

マージナル・ オペレーション

☆ 星海社 FICTIONS
MARGINAL
OPERATION

01

芝村裕吏

YURI SHIBAMURA

ILLUSTRATION

しずまよしのり

ARATA THE NEXT OF 30 YEARS OLD.
THE NEW JOB WHICH
HE CHOSE TO WORK IN
A PRIVATE MILITARY AND
SECURITY COMPANY.
THAT IS, IT WAS A MERCENARY.



M0001

Marginal Operation

01

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Prologue

Bombardment. Piercing whistle. Shell misses, exploding away from the village.

During my stay in the company I never saw anything like that, but it seems to me it was a mortar. As it is a simple cannon, since it was invented, it is frequently used here even at present. I heard that apparently some extremists once aimed it at the imperial palace.

Mortar shells are fired continuously, one might even say – with certain grace. This loud sound is like a music of the battlefield, similar to the sound of a paper popper. So I thought that if it goes like this any longer, soon it will start hitting the village. It's possible that in the past people also killed each other while listening to this stupid war music.

Oh well, now it's irrelevant, time for thinking is after. Or before.

Putting on earmuffs I said as seriously as I can: "Many times have I thought of ways to end this war. For now it goes well. Let's remain calm to keep it that way."

Boys and girls around nod their heads. I don't want at least my eyes to betray me. To tell the truth that's why I tried to put such seriousness that didn't suit me in this speech.

While setting the formation, I went with my thoughts back to the past. To the times in Tokyo, when I didn't have a penny to my name.

Chapter 1

Time in Japan

In Japanese media the word mercenary, at least by name, does not appear. Lately as contractors they call themselves private military companies to bypass international treaties.

I found employment in one of these companies because I was unemployed and didn't want to become a NEET again.

That's right, I was a NEET once. I don't want to mention it, but it's an undeniable fact that I was.

NEET – Not in education, employment or training young man. Specifically I was simply a young unemployed, what's more without money for further education.

Of course at the start I didn't want such life. Young people don't plan to become NEETs from the beginning. They just become them. In my case, after finishing high-school I wasn't ready to seek employment in some company and my family didn't have money to send me to university. That's why I went to a telecommunications post-secondary school.

I was interested in LN^[1], games and manga. When it comes to LN, I didn't have the writing talent for light novels nor the skills to draw manga, so by the process of elimination I was left with making games. That's why I went to a vocational school.

From today's perspective that was probably doomed to fail from the start. Making a half-assed choice rather doesn't give good results, but I didn't think about it at that time. I simply helplessly choose in life what came to my head.

Nonetheless I have to admit I was trying in this school. I was studying, actually I was mainly tinkering with PC bought by my parents. Learning in school and tinkering with my PC were the

same to me, so in reality my grades were above average.

And that's how a year passed in the blink of an eye and then I started to look for a job. Not because I wanted to, rather because everyone was looking, so I started too.

Only after I started looking for work did I realize that there is a crisis in the game industry. There was no place for me with my results. I could go to some other industry, but that's not why I learned all that. I insisted on the gaming industry and wanted no other. In the end, when as a twenty-year old I graduated, I didn't have a set life path yet.

And that's how I became a NEET.

Recalling that period, sensing the coming crisis I think it would have been better to work then. But I couldn't work during spring break. With that feeling I spent the first day, and then second. When I realized, it came out that I have taken extended 2 year-long holidays.

Life of a NEET and holidays are similar to each other. Looking back at that time I'm not saying that it wasn't pleasant, but being a NEET was hard.

I feel bad about it, but I have a strong feeling that I left everyone somewhere behind. I realized this when we went drinking with our class. Though I could speak only about LN, manga and games, the rest was different. They talked without bigger interest about work, politics, senpais they didn't like, overtime, their partners or rumors about who is getting married.

When I asked if they like to talk about it they always replied laughing. "Not really, but you know..."

Well that was my feeling of leaving everyone behind. I considered everyone strange and although I myself only talked about LN, manga and games, I didn't have the gall to feel like a winner. Still, years after graduating verified that I'm a loser.

Soon after I started to seriously look for a job it came to me.

I tried to live not being in anyone's way and depending on the situation I lived thanks to the goodwill of my parents and classmates. Without money it was indeed hard, but I managed somehow. That was not the problem. I somehow realized that even if I worked nothing will change. I wasn't the type of NEET that was afraid to go out to people. If it's bad anyway, I didn't want to additionally disappoint my parents. That was the reason I looked for work. There wasn't particularly any other.

And that's how I found work in a printing house dealing with small projects. I had other ambitions, but during my time NEETing my chances in the gaming industry got even smaller. There was no place in there for people like me.

Already from the first day as a NEET it was to be expected, but I didn't do anything about it. Only recently I became aware of how badly I failed thinking that someday, maybe the situation will improve itself. I was a complete deadbeat. The result of this laziness was my quite delayed entry into society. And this entrance was a small company in which I was mainly responsible for making leaflets.

Since I started working there, I always made two hours of overtime. It was a black company^[2], but I comforted myself that it's better than physical work. Income was paltry, but still better than none. Anyway from the start I didn't have any special expectations and a plus was that I had work two stations from home.

This doesn't mean I was satisfied. Constant demands of my boss and clients for corrections were taking their toll on me. At the start I was trying to explain that that's how it was supposed to be done, but I always received an answer with disdainful smile: "You have a very good memory but your skills..."

Despite that I didn't stop working there. It's hard to admit, but

they weren't really wrong. I don't have a sense for making leaflets. When it comes to memory they were not quite right either, though if I saw some leaflet I could mostly remember its pattern and layout.

Since I had a pile of work, I was taking care of those designs daily. It's not like I didn't have a sense, it's just that I could only design something I saw somewhere. Maybe if I spent more time and took care of it I could obtain my own style, but I didn't do it. I was really lazy. I was aware of that the whole time and just counted that someday everything will work out by itself, that maybe that nasty boss will someday disappear. Everyday with this belief I worked further.

In the meantime before the boss disappeared, three years after I started working, the company went bankrupt. New government still claimed that economy is in good condition, but it was completely unnoticeable.

For me bankruptcy was the best sign of a crisis. It seemed to me that being a NEET was my destiny, on the other hand thought about returning to that state irritated me.

Despite everything, I have enthusiasm in me. I already had thirty years. I didn't read as many LN and thought more often about finding a wife than porn or characters from manga. I thought it was already that time.

So once again I looked for work. At that time I wasn't a loafer anymore. Waiting for everything to resolve itself didn't bring anything good so far. I was already too old, as a thirty-year-old it was high time to straighten myself.

It was hard to find a job, but I was expecting that. Both my age, economic situation and private and social life weren't too colorful.

Terms of employment were getting worse anyway. The problem was not the falling, but to what degree they will fall.

That's when my attention was glued to the advertisement of a private military company, present in the sponsor frame of the search engine.

At the start I clicked it from pure curiosity, while reading I added it to my bookmarks though. That was it.

They wrote that they are tripling the salary, that yearly pay is 6,000,000 yen^[3], additionally it wasn't a physical job and there was no experience needed. Requirements were to not have finished 30 years and computer knowledge. The secret of that rise was the risk. The Danger of the loss of life. The catch was to take that risk. Naturally in that case remuneration was high. Salary amount probably accounted for the fact that joining a foreign army was not received well in this country.

I started checking on the Internet the location and details of the job and opinions about the company. I treated it quite seriously, after all my life was at stake. It seemed to me like a perfect offer.

The risk of death in modern wars was low. More of a problem was the risk of mental disorder induced by excessive stress. Even today with all the technological advancements it's quite common. It wasn't so perfect at all.

From today's perspective taking into account the exposure of life and mental health, the pay was low. It came out about the same in relation to annual income from working whole life and early retirement.

Accepting the terms presented in the information about the job offer, I applied. I didn't wish for death, but I didn't really care about my life either. There weren't any tests or anything else, so the first thing I did was to renovate the room with a small amount of money from the contract. I bought LN, computer and some figurines and arranged for the maintenance of my room while I will be gone.

If I died, the rent payment will be halted and the contract will expire automatically. If I live, I will have some savings. Working a few years, I could get employed in a security company. It didn't sit well with me, but I would take any coming opportunity.

Ability test

I assumed that I won't come home for some time, but in life it never goes the way we assume.

How big was my disappointment, when from the notice it turned out that my new workplace not only was in the same country, but even in the same city in an office building in Shinagawa. I have a feeling that along with the disappointment I lost my energy. As a matter of fact I think it means the same thing.

In any case with this feeling I went to the site. Probably they saved up on electricity, because the conference room was quite dark. In this secluded atmosphere, along with me a number of people was gathered.

Aside from me everyone looked nervous. I realized that ironically till yesterday I was worrying like stupid. Now probably the interview will start.

To not let stress return I looked around. People around twenty, thirty and even forty-year old. Everyone looked like they were in a similar situation to mine. They found themselves here without any means to live, claiming unemployed benefits, without any motivation.

I felt sorry for them, but I didn't say anything, because they would not be happy that someone like them pitied them.

In the end some man came. He looked like a white American or European, maybe English or French, but I could not tell

from his looks. He had a powerful physique but he was shaking. Despite that, probably to look more serious, he had sunglasses on him. Additionally to that he had a white shirt and a tie. So plain that I wouldn't think he was someone from a military company.

“Welcome everyone to our company. I am Andrew.”

Then it's like he hesitated, so I started wondering whether I should respond using simple language, but then Andrew spoke.

“I know that each of you signed a contract, but you can cancel them during the next seven days.”

After he looked around over everyone gathered he continued.

“This is a really heavy work, not counting those seven days, maybe during the term of the contract somewhere far in a foreign country suddenly someone will want to quit. In that case though it would be a problem not only for us, but for you too. To avoid that our company will conduct a simple test. It's compulsory, but the result is not binding. You can place a request to annul the contract as well as continue working in our company even if someone doesn't do well on the test.”

Here Andrew made a wry smile.

“Nonetheless with all my heart I advise to cancel the contract in that case. Because of the nature of missions that you would be performing, you must leave behind national safety, democracy or freedom. Our company is not interested in religion or political views. I ask you to do the same. What you will be doing is work and only work.”

He said with something resembling compassion. From everyone present here, only he weren't in such a poor position and only from his side could come compassion.

Andrew spoke further.

“Work, especially in Japan, is treated too seriously. It's not

easy for me to say, but if someone cares that much it's better for him use that energy to look for work elsewhere. This way he will undoubtedly be happier.”

A smile appeared on Andrew's face.

“Please don't forget about that. Then let's begin the test.”

They told everyone to stand before a big blue button. From the corner of my eye I saw that from the hastily set up row of buttons extend a cable to the neighboring room.

“In the next room there is a computer, which is in turn connected via Internet to rifles in a place for conducting death sentences in some country. If you press the button – boom. With 100% certainty you can kill someone from a distance.”

Said Andrew calmly. Through the sunglasses I couldn't read his expression.

“This test consist of pressing that button.”

Few voices immediately resounded.

“Wait a moment!”

“Alright, for you the test has ended.” Said Andrew and then took them to their seats.

I wondered when you can start. There was no point in dragging it, so I immediately asked if I already can. Receiving permission I pressed the button using my thumb. Just that and I could return to my seat.

I saw that many still hesitated, many were dumbfounded and others could not believe it, asking Andrew if it's for real. After I sat down I thought that there is no way it was serious, besides surely they couldn't conduct this test before signing a contract due to confidentiality agreement. Quite well conceived.

“You have finished fast. You must have nerves of steel. Or maybe you are just stupid?” Some awfully fast talking and

somewhat erratic guy from the back approached me. He was one of those that pressed the button after me.

First half, that at the beginning raised their voice already started to leave. I doubt I will meet them again. Not that I don't like meeting people, but not everyone suits me. This crank from the back was one of those that don't.

Irritated I was silent, and he went on.

“Although as a rehearsal it was a great exercise. This time it's probably really not seriously, but they want to show us what's waiting for us. Sooner or later there will come a time to press the real button. The point is to realize that.”

That's obvious. I thought I would retort him but he was already excited enough so I managed to hold back. Maybe he had mental disorders. Taking that into account I think I could understand how he feels. I decided to stay silent. Maybe he was just annoying. Or maybe both. In any case the test probably gave results that the company expected. I couldn't say what I would do, when the time comes for real action.

It seems to me that from that time I stopped thinking about it entirely. Anyway the test has ended.

At home I ate a hot cup of yakisoba^[4].

They said I have a week of free time, certainly to think this through and take care of your business. I myself did not need that time. It's not that I was determined, it's just that I had nothing better to do. I didn't especially think about the meaning of the blue button either. Work is not pleasant, but not so much as being a NEET. Moreover I have my age.

Although Andrew said that if someone doesn't like it he can search for a better job for himself, but in my case there was no choice. Probably something would have come out of it, if during this week I would have desperately looked for a job

other than pushing a blue button, but I did nothing. I was already tired from looking for work. That's how I was after all.

That day it even hit me that I didn't have any trouble falling asleep, but when I remembered that there were news in TV and Internet about murders and other cruelties daily that didn't really move me, I calmed down.

I wonder if I could do it since it doesn't move me. There is nothing in me that I wouldn't know about. I know myself, that's why I could calm down and masturbate.

After a week I officially established the contract and left Tokyo.

This annoying guy that approached me then didn't appear.

Sunglasses

Before leaving Tokyo, first of course I went to a private airport. I received a ticket with a plane change in Central Asia. By the way it was in the economy class. I wasn't informed yet exactly in which country.

I took my luggage and went to the office building in Shinagawa where the test was conducted and took the plane ticket. The office like always had dimmed lightning. Probably very few could guess that it was a private military company.

When I came to the office I met Andrew again. This time he was not wearing sunglasses. His eyes looked smarter than I thought. It's curious after all why he was wearing sunglasses in a dark room.

"I knew you would come. You have the disposition." He said while handing me the ticket. I did not think about a suitable answer. Should I be happy or say that he isn't right. I wasn't interested.

The whole time I was thinking about those sunglasses.

“Why don’t you have sunglasses today?” I asked about what occupied my mind.

He opened his eyes wide, then narrowed them and said while laughing.

“Eyes are a treasury of information. I don’t want someone to read me using them.”

I thanked him for the answer and took the ticket.

Getting on the bus to the airport Andrew said to me.

“Have a nice job”

I never had a nice job, I doubt this one will be. I replied in my thoughts.

Using quick steps I boarded the bus and managed to take a seat at the very end.

Supporting my head on the window I reflected, whether this company by chance isn’t looking for people who don’t care.

^ 1. There can’t possibly be someone here that doesn’t know what it stands for.... can there? (Light novel).

^ 2. Black company is a company that exploits their employees.

^ 3. Around 51k USD or 44k EUR as of January 2015.

^ 4. A type of noodles eaten in Japan, usually with some additional ingredients or sauce.

Chapter 2

English practice in a brothel

Training camp

I don't really remember all prefectures of Japan, but if I have to say what I know about Central Asia, then speaking truthfully I know nothing. Only that in the name of countries there is some *-stan*.

Nonetheless I didn't see that as a problem, neither did I want to know more. I wasn't interested in that.

That the destination was Uzbekistan I learned from the ticket at the airport.

At that time I didn't know any language other than Japanese, that's why I wondered whether that wasn't more of a problem.

Two plane changes and twelve hours later.

My loins and neck were sore, because it was shaking all the time during this long flight. Stretching my back I looked around.

The local airport was very modern, but I was surprised that opening and closing of the door took place by inputting personal data. I don't know why.

Outside of language and skin color of people passing me by, this was the first time I felt I was abroad.

There was only five of us Japanese, so we kept together.

Some awfully tall man approached and said he was from the company.

"With Japanese please come here."

He had tanned skin, but he was also white I think.

Not knowing in which country we were nor being sure, we got on the van.

We drove a wide road from the airport, not seeing anything other than occasional road trees. There were almost no buildings. It was a comfortable ride, because the road was straight all the time.

Wide fields found on the left and right side of the road were cotton fields. At least someone in the car said so, but how much of it was the truth I don't know.

It looked like a film was glued to the window, because the hue was constant all the time. The landscape outside seemed to have a calm, deep color.

I remembered "The Wizard of Oz". Magical emerald city, seen through green glasses.

The man from the airport was our driver. I noticed, that since he entered the vehicle he had sunglasses on him, but this time it was caused by strong sunlight. Driving the van he spoke.

"I am Ben. Welcome in a foreign land. It's hot outside, but car interior guarantees us some cold. Please don't mind the views. After you undergo thirteen week-long training you will be sent to different places. Till that time any free time you must spend in the training camp. Of course there is a bar there and you can also order goods from Amazon. There are no inconveniences so please don't worry."

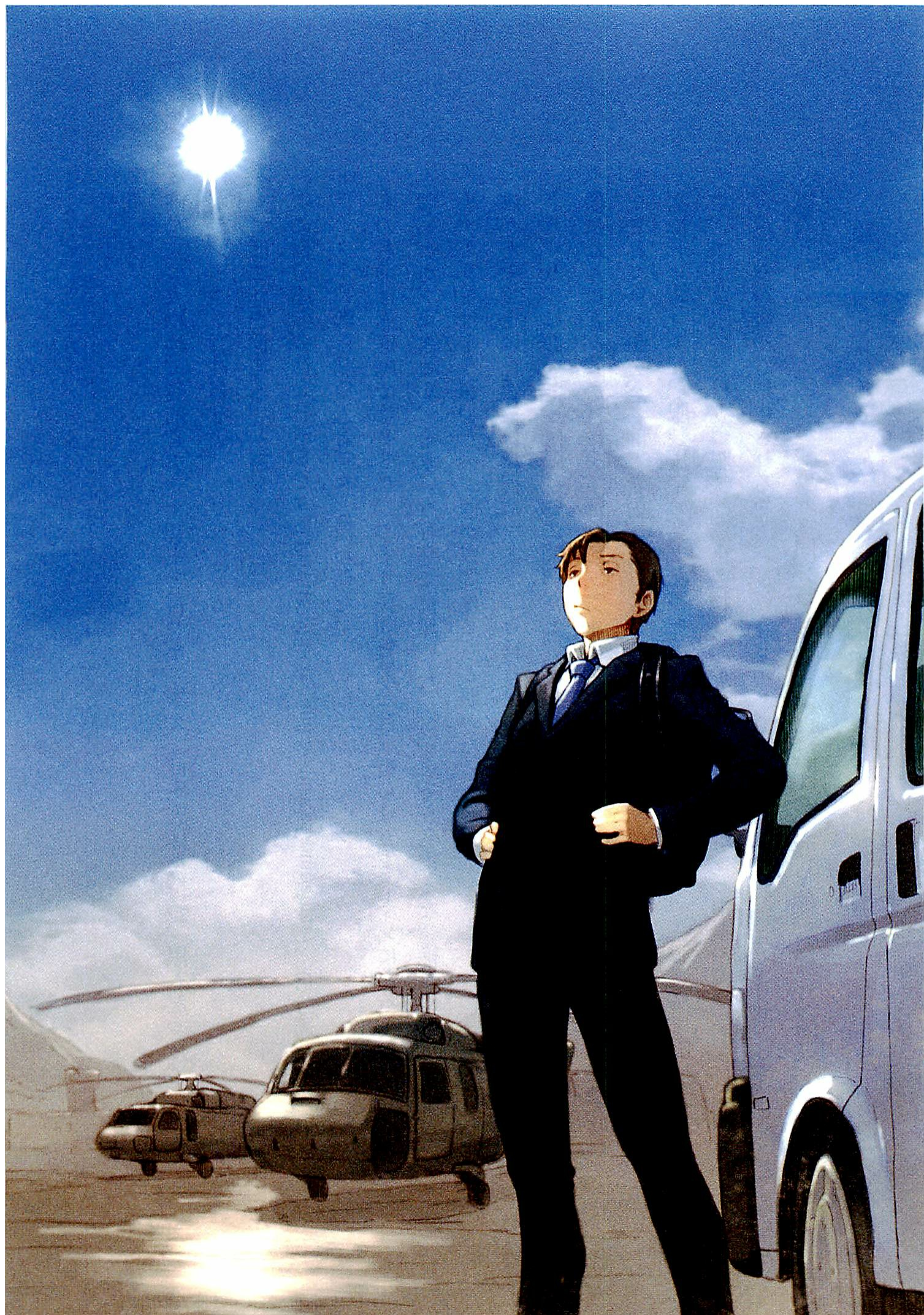
I was interested in a magical emerald city, but I didn't care about Central Asia's urban landscape. That's why I stayed silent.

I don't know if it's because of the window seat, but despite strong air conditioning I was hot.

After 2 hours long drive with shaking, when my rear and back went completely stiff, the car stopped.

After taking off the green glasses, it turned out that this was a brown-red sandy place with hot wind, moreover the sky was so blue, like nothing I have ever seen in Japan till now.

Quite sore I stretched my loins admiring the sky.



Suddenly I hear a shrill noise.

I saw how from the military helicopter armed with a machine gun, came out company employees with serious faces and different clothes, dispersing and carefully standing in a row next to each other.

According to Ben's instructions we got a bed number and we went to a huge dormitory with a half-circular shape.

They assured there will be air conditioning, but for the noise it made, it wasn't cooler at all.

Beds were bunk beds. I was assigned a place at the top.

Leaving my hand luggage, I went to the assembly point.

I asked for permission to go to the restroom and took care of my needs. I was instructed that next time, I will not receive permission and from now on I have to organize my time in a way, that allows me to take care of it in my own time.

Apparently short and maybe even longer things in a restroom have to be taken care of quickly in this company.

The meeting took place in a room called conference room. It was impressive, though there weren't any tables. That reminded me, that in the room in Tokyo there weren't any either. I wonder what to do about writing and taking notes.

The man who stood at the front introduced himself as Charlie. He was a well-built black man.

“Attention^[1]. Attention. That's something you have to remember first. Next, you have to call the company PMSCs (Private Military and Security Companies) and yourself a contractor, contractor.”

He said.

“In developed countries under the name PSC, that is private

security company, which makes us security personnel. There is no such thing as a mercenary or soldier, don't call yourself that under any circumstances. Any questions?"

Someone raised a hand.

"And why not?"

Charlie nodded and replied.

"Issues with international treaties."

I see. A genuine black company, under this name we do on the side all those shady things, that are forbidden by international treaties – I thought.

Next, dress code was mentioned. We are not soldiers, so any clothing is fine. With the exception, that flashy clothes are forbidden. Just like any military clothing, doesn't matter if it's recycled or a Chinese imitation.

We do what soldiers do, but we can't look like soldiers do – I thought. Even from today's perspective I think, that in fact it is that way.

At the end Charlie told us about the training schedule for the next thirteen weeks.

Wake up at 5:30. After morning toilet, assembly at 5:45. Breakfast at 5:55. At 6:15 beginning of classes.

We work in a 100 minute mode. 90 minutes as a standard unit for class duration. In addition to that, time to take a break and relocate – 10 minutes.

In a day we have 6 lesson units for a total of 10 hours. There is no lunch break. Bringing notebooks is forbidden.

They said there will be no time to look at a notebook or any other text.

During class we will learn the necessary knowledge. There is no physical education^[2], but to maintain health a gym will be

available and it is recommended to use it in spare time. A hour is enough.

We go to sleep at 22:30. We get furlough only once every 5 days.

You have to stick to the time allocated to sleep.

In case of health issues, according to the agreement, contract will be annulled.

There will be a test on the 5th week and according to the results, they will decide what's next.

From 6th week onwards language lessons will start. Depending on the workplace.

At the same time, on the same basis, training matched to the mission and equipment will start.

It seems, that from this moment for some time, they provide us with healthy lifestyle. I don't care whether it's good or bad. Ten hours working time without commuting is within the range of my tolerance.

Since they pay me for this, I'm not complaining.

Computer Game

That was all for the first day of the training camp.

Charlie said to use the rest of the time, to get used to the new time zone, and that there will probably be some, that can take few days for that, but here they must deal with it in one.

In my case it was not a problem. After all I was unemployed and I went to sleep and woke up at various times.

I went to sleep ahead of time and started training the next day. The first thing was training pressing a blue button, same as the one in Tokyo.

It was required to press it when needed. When an enemy appears or we find ourselves in range.

Sometimes a civilian appeared, in that case for pressing the blue button, points were subtracted.

I pressed the button repeatedly the whole day.

In the end not thinking about the target of my pressing, I started doing it automatically. Certainly when the right time comes I will do the same.

The button, which I probably already pressed more than a few thousand times, will become a gun trigger.

During that time not only me, but everyone in the camp started pressing it automatically. Really, a well thought out exercise.

I was impressed, that at the end of class, when I started losing my concentration, wrong hints on targets also started appearing. Although no matter what you say, concentration is always hard.

Initially, those were days that just by pressing the blue button by itself, I was exhausted.

I thought that it cannot continue and started thinking of a good way to resolve this.

I noticed that there is a pattern in hints. Starting from sudden ones, through repeating ones, ending with a period where you start to lose concentration and the button should not be pressed.

Actually the time when you could relax was when hints were repeating. The worst was during that last period.

Moving your body and resting your mind are two different things. When I understood that I made a big step forward. During the repeating series allow your head to rest and during

times of peace, that is during the last phase, stop resting.

I remembered exercises^[3] in elementary school. I thought then, that it was all about standing uniformly, but I realized that I learned something quite significant for this job. Even in standing uniformly there is some discrepancy. When we take note of that discrepancy and we move, the difference will grow bigger.

It's important to realize it and take advantage of it. That gives good results.

When first day off ended on the 5th day, I was already very good in pressing the blue button.

On my first day off I went to sleep. Majority of the Japanese did the same.

After the next day off on the 5th day, the number of buttons increased. Operations to move forward and fall back appeared and instead of hints there was a description of the situation.

After learning about the situation, you had to press an appropriate button. It was more complicated than before, but just that.

After yet another cycle a few different kinds of blue buttons appeared. It was about pressing the correct one.

Looking at the computer screen, when a tactic plan for a given situation appeared, I pressed the appropriate buttons.

This wasn't even similar to a computer game – it was blatantly a computer game.

I finally guessed why they hired Japanese that have little in common with war. Both drills and computer games were after all a basic element of culture for Japanese nowadays.

From the start it was all about dividing us accordingly.

Brothel

For the first time I was able to put my day off to a good use on the third time. This probably means I got used to the conditions here.

Kishimoto, who joined in the same year as me, told me that free time here is usually spent on sexual services, but I wasn't interested in going to such places, so I stayed alone in camp.

I got on the courtesy car that was leaving the camp.

I thought that I made a mistake getting on it. I didn't understand what they're saying. Maybe it's our company policy, but fortunately all classes were held in Japanese, so I already got used to it.

However it seems that here they didn't care about that. Maybe because of carelessness? Shyness? I can't describe it differently.

In the car you spoke in English I think. I sat in my seat and stayed silent. What to do, when I don't understand what they are talking about. Even if I understood, I would've probably said nothing.

After 30 minutes we have arrived.

I didn't know exactly where, but I more or less guessed, that they will come pick me up in the evening. I also have an impression, that they also warned me about something, but I haven't really understood that.

Probably to not wander off too far away from the building with sexual services.

I think I'm guessing correctly that rather than desertion, that the company doesn't tolerate, it's about obligations to this country.

In any case, I don't understand what they are speaking to me

anyway, so I can't help it. I started to search for a place nearby where I could sit and wait for them to pick me up, but when I was looking around the area, I was dragged by the people in the building inside.

They didn't speak Japanese or English there, yet despite that everyone in some magical way understood each other.

Common thing for the whole world. If you think about it, this place was a sexual salvation for all nations. The company I belong to also offers one of such things characteristic to the military.

Despite being universal for all countries, it is generally not very welcome.

Inside was a loud air conditioning, but instead of a pleasant cool atmosphere it was downright cold.

A fat woman, clearly older than my mother, who looked like a brothel madam, came to say something.

I had problems, because I didn't understand what she was saying, and neither did she, however after a while she brought a girl.

She had quite manlike clothes, trousers in ivory color and a white shirt, but her appearance was as womanly as possible. What stood out was something different. Darkish skin, big eyes and long, curly, black hair.

When I saw her I wondered how old she could be. She had deep wrinkles on her face, I wonder if it's because of the sun. She could be in her teens as well as in her thirties, it was impossible to tell how old she was exactly.

I haven't watched women so much that I would be familiar with it, but in her case I couldn't even begin to guess.

“Japanese, right?”

She said and I nodded. She explained that she is called Shawii and she charges 100 dollars in advance.

When I paid, the brothel madam whistled. Shawii smiled slightly and while pulling my sleeves said.

“Come here, please.”

I was offered a room without doors. Perhaps originally they were there, but apparently they were removed from the whole building.

It doesn't matter whether you don't want to see the neighboring room. You can see and hear everything.

I asked Shawii why there are no doors while drinking alcohol she gave me.

“Precaution”

Smiling, she replied shortly. She was sitting beside me on the sofa while sticking close to me. It was pleasant to feel the warmth of human skin. It's possible that this too strong air conditioning was supposed to bring this effect. Every work is full of new solutions.

“Meaning?”

I asked Shawii, which smiled even more. She thought for a bit and while looking me in the face, said seriously.

“Sometimes a customer is drunk. Strangling, drugs, firearms, beating and knives are forbidden. That's why there are no doors.”

I was impressed. Idea that for protection there are no doors was for me something entirely new. Rather unthinkable in Japan.

Not minding my surprise, Shawii started squirming as though she were uncomfortable.

Only much later did I learn that such talks make the work of

those girls more difficult. However at that time I didn't know that.

I had no way of knowing because I was lacking experience. In Japan I never were in such a place. I wondered myself what I was doing there.

Later I have concluded, that I probably just wanted some privacy. Beside restroom, I constantly spent my time with lots of random people.

I was already tired of that, very tired. Although I didn't even think that in the place I escaped to, there wouldn't be any doors.

I only wanted privacy.

Honestly, to express with words exactly how I was feeling, I would say that I didn't need company.

Sometime around the noon I ate undercooked bread with chicken boiled with onion, garlic and pepper.

They didn't bill me anything for that.

Shawii looked puzzled.

I was satisfied with the taste and I started talking to her.

She probably understood at last what sort of customer she was dealing with and agreed to the conversation. And so the time has passed.

In the evening I returned to the camp.

Just before going out I had a feeling that something was bothering her, but I had no idea what it was.

"Please, absolutely come again."

She said and I hesitantly nodded.

Kishimoto

“You got overcharged!”

Said surprised Kishimoto, when I directly told him about today events, not mentioning the details.

Kishimoto was someone from my group, that came here from Tokyo. You could say he was from the same year. I think he was older than me.

He has an adopted son, but he did something bad and ran here. Affair, embezzlement, debts. I heard such rumors, but discrepancy between them was too large and in all I didn't learn anything, so I ignored them.

Between Japanese from the same group apparently such talks about someone's life took place, however I wasn't interested in them, so despite the fact that I only spoke Japanese, I knew almost nothing about these people.

Kishimoto as the only one from our group knew English, so he was important for relaying information.

He took some money during shopping, but even though some realized that, no one said anything. He was useful for us after all.

Kishimoto claimed that at such a place you have to negotiate the price and that next time I should do it as it should be done, but I didn't reply nor even nod.

I looked pessimistically at tomorrow, not sure what will be next, but under the influence of today's events I thought about Shawii, the woman with a terribly ruined skin. At least on the emotional level I felt some connection with her.

“Well next time it will go better.”

Kishimoto left laughing.

That was the last time when I saw him. I haven't told him about Shawii.

The company didn't give any explanation on the subject of Kishimoto's disappearance. It seems they didn't have any obligation nor need to do that.

There were different rumors, such as, he resigned after he was assaulted, they sent him to a different program or that he died in an accident.

But just as with his life, you couldn't trust those stories. All of them were uncertain after all.

After this event everyone ceased their social interactions. I don't think I would be wrong saying they realized the pointlessness of building relationships here.

It's awfully hard to start over building new relationships after they're destroyed once or twice.

Not only me, but everyone from our group limited their everyday conversations to necessary minimum needed for work.

Stiff shoulders and eyestrain

Since that time, beside training exercises, there was nothing special to do.

It didn't matter if it was a day off or not, you couldn't use Internet or phone anyway.

Taking into account country, in which this camp was located and work performed, it was obvious.

Easy to say, but initially due to the lack of Internet, after 10 hour-long work I was terribly tired and only slept.

Later when I finally got used to the conditions here and understood that I can't use the Internet, other Japanese from the group already accepted that, but I couldn't come to terms with that.

Not only was this country far from Japan, where additionally this black company ignored international treaties.

Setting aside bypassing international treaties, they could after all say to me – don't call us a black company just because you can't use Internet – but for me, from the start lack of access to pages with videos or Twitter was quite stressful.

In that aspect as an otaku I stayed behind everyone. It pissed me off.

In this season admittedly there weren't any good anime, but since I can't watch the next one either, I didn't understand anymore what's the point of me working here.

I even had a period when I seriously considered leaving, but I really don't have the balls to do something like that.

To my dismay, with time I got used to life without the Internet and anime. A weight from the heart.

Actually it's probably more like putting aside cigarettes, first smoking withdrawal and then fear of smoking again.

Anyway to my surprise their absence stopped bothering me. I thought that after a year, when I come back to Japan, I will start watching again.

For the time being I should be glad, that I could gather some savings.

In the meantime I got better and better at my job.

Pro gamer in pressing blue buttons – that was my whole work.

Unlike Japanese games, this one had poor graphics and occasionally you were unable to finish it.

Additionally you had to play for many hours.

After such time the eyes are tired. Eyelids get heavy and eyes bloodshot.

This is not a joke, after a few days sharpness of eyesight is declining.

I lowered brightness of the monitor to minimum and began to care for my eye hygiene. Left was the problem with my neck. Ten hours of work isn't just for show.

In the 4th or 5th day off ... that was before the assignment test, so in 4th – I thought about using the opportunity to order something. Some ointment for shoulders and something good for the eyes, blackberries.

I already decided to make a purchase, but I realized the stupid mistake I made – there was no Internet access after all.

Only then I realized that when they were speaking about Amazon, it was a joke. I'm a moron, you can't put it differently.

I was starting to forget about this frustration from the lack of Internet, but it seemed that it's returning again, though it won't change anything anyway.

In the end I spoke with two Japanese from my group and asked if they don't have any way to deal with eyestrain and stiff shoulders.

They were doing daily the same thing, and they looked like they had the same problem, so an answer came immediately.

You should put a hot towel to your eyes and put pebbles on your eyelids, apparently it's good when there is some weight on them. For stiff shoulders apparently remains the gym.

Everything apparently, nothing 100% sure, but what can you do. That's all the knowledge of a unit deprived of Google.

After ten hours of work, from all my muscles, shoulders I had already forged.

I barely swung the dumbbells, but I had a feeling it actually helped.

After putting a hot towel to my eyes their condition also actually improved.

Mirror next to the showers doesn't get foggy, but that's the issue of the local climate.

That's why luckily it's easy to make such towel. It's enough that wet it lies for a bit on the sun and it's ready.

You just have to watch out, so it won't get completely dry.

It's pleasant to put it to your eyes. Even in Japan there is no greater pleasure.

Assignment Test

Day after the fifth day off, assignment test was held.

Though actually it was the same thing as always. Just pushing blue buttons.

Within this kind of game, the number of buttons increased, but in the end nothing really changed.

Although they weren't blue anymore, but I call them that for my own convenience. Blue button is for me a symbol of this job.

Situation that was presented on the test was quite hard. Two tactical P units were driving separately along a road with the width of one-lane. During the ride an explosion occurs.

For the report on the situation a Q button is used.

There is no response from the unit commander, there is a response from the sub-commander, finally an EX occurs, or explosion.

Looking over the responses of other members you have 2 seconds to think, imagining the situation.

The first vehicle with the leader of the P unit is blown up. I

immediately gave the command for them to move away over 200 m from there.

During staying here in shock, another attack will probably happen.

Looking at the map I give commands on how they should relocate. I withdraw the unit, ordering them to ride in zigzag in the middle of the road as fast as possible.

There is no point in counterattacking, I'm focusing on relocating.

After 300 m there is a checkpoint of an allied force. I'm keeping a distance.

Taking into account how it went till now enemy numbers rather aren't so great. Coming to the way in which the enemy operates to obtain points, probably the checkpoint will be his target. In this place there is the biggest possible point gain for the enemy. My P unit was attacked by a diversion.

I ignored a prompt-note with a request to recover the bodies.

A request to confirm the number of wounded popped up, but as a priority I choose withdrawal.

The frequent reason for defeat, was focusing on taking care of the dead, or establishing the number of wounded, when the next attack was coming. That's what I wanted to avoid.

Ally was 300m away. Thanks to the explosion and the abandoned vehicle the road is blocked, that's a good situation.

I give a command to the sub-commander to hide behind the first vehicle and regroup. 3 S units are left. Situation is changing.

Explosion occurs in the checkpoint. I send one unit to the nearest building. There is a high chance there is a sniper there. He is not there. Immediately I direct the rest of the S units to

the checkpoint through the edge of the road. Rally command. Unit from the building starts to move.

There is a lot of points for saving the checkpoint. After losing the P leader you can get them too.

Another request to collect the bodies. I'm sending only one S unit to the car that exploded earlier. Local civilian populace might turn out to be hostile, I don't know why, but locals from the buildings, that were attacked, become mostly hostile.

I concluded that to avoid that, you have to make it so the citizens won't approach the vehicle.

For now I will only secure the explosion site, and later will collect the bodies. It seems that the intensive fight in the checkpoint is coming to the end, and the pinned down enemy intends to retreat.

I carry out an assault there using the two remaining S units.

For the first time today I pushed the blue button. I wait two minutes. While I hesitate whether to push the confirming Q button, I receive a report from the sub-commander, that one S unit eliminated the enemy. Report about withdrawing comes.

I issue a command to torment the retreating enemy.

I order a sniper to attack the fleeing enemy. Part of the S unit I call back to the vehicle, confirm again the elimination of the enemy by the S unit and withdraw everyone.

I gather everyone in the vehicle, collecting bodies of the dead and wounded. And that's how the test ended.

To tell the truth I don't know if I did well. It was always like that, the company never gave a full explanation.

Nonetheless since that day I was separated from others to another program.

My job didn't change, but during the task the map, that is

topography, was completely different. Mountainous with poor field of view.

It seems harder than the previous one.

Additional holiday

After assignment test ended, I received additionally two extra days off.

At the beginning I accepted them with enthusiasm, but really in the camp there was not much to do.

I considered whether to go to the brothel, but I wasn't in the mood. I could also somehow with broken English buy a beer, but that's also annoying so I gave up that idea.

Ultimately I decided to use that time for sleeping. It's great to sleep.

I got up in the evening and went to the unfinished parking lot to see the setting sun. I sat on a nearby rock. It proved to be too hot, so I decided to stand.

So far you couldn't afford to spend time in such a sophisticated way.

Suddenly I thought that I would want to learn English. Especially in conditions where I have a narrow range of possibilities, not knowing the language limits them even more. It can't be like that anymore.

I have nothing against this sunset, but I was getting depressed on the thought, that on every such occasion I would have to watch it.

Learning materials were a problem. I was excited, because till now I didn't have a willingness to learn, but I could use at least some textbooks not to mention a teacher. How can I get them here... .

I ate dinner and to move my body I went to the gym. There I thought about it all the time.

When I was taking a shower I found an answer.

They work poorly in this country. Only enough so everyone can wash their head.

More or less after two minutes water stops flowing. There are no bathtubs. If you don't plan your bathing well, you will end with only a washed head.

During my short stay under the shower I thought, that I will go to the brothel after all.

Following day, before noon I got on the shaking van and headed to the brothel. Happy old lady recognized me and immediately called Shawii.

"You came at last. What were you doing?"

She said holding my shoulders.

Walking she was still holding me by my shoulders. I asked her if she speaks English.

"Yes"

She answered coldly.

I was glad. Shawii makes a puzzled face.

I asked her if she could get me materials for English, some ointment for stiff shoulders or blackberries.

"Do you understand where we are?"

More than surprised, a bit upset, she replied.

I don't have any other person I can count on. I understand you, forgive me, but please – I pressed further despite her resistance.

"100\$"

I paid immediately.

After receiving the money, with a gloomy face as if wondering, she says.

“You have to come on every day off.”

And that’s how my English classes started.

Shawii with incomprehensible for me embarrassment began teaching. That’s when I realized that she most probably received higher education. It’s rather impossible that on a university.

Shawii’s English, company’s English

English, that I’m learning in the brothel proved to be more ordinary than I thought.

After the assignment test, in parallel English classes in the company started, but I want to focus on English with Shawii.

Shawii was a good teacher. Practical, she taught what actually will be useful. Not sentences like : this is a pen.

We started from English used during shopping: how much does it cost? ; too expensive ; I don’t need that ; I will take it for that much.

Indeed 70% of English used abroad concerns shopping or ordering something so it was at the same time practical and helpful.

Such useful English acquired early really helps with further learning. Experience, that you learned something useful motivates to continue learning.

In this regard Shawii was a really good teacher. She understands what a foreigner needs.

Next I learned commonplace phrases. Pointing a finger, ask:

What is it? ; What is it for? ; What is this thing? ; simpler, please. Once again useful things. Now you can ask about things you do not know.

Next came vocabulary. Pointing at different things, sometime on her body parts, Shawii told me to answer.

That's how I was learning the basics.

When I find something difficult to answer, I point it out.

There were also times it didn't resemble normal classes, but generally thanks to this method I learned the minimum necessary, taking my first steps in the basics.

In the company on the other hand, English was simple, boring and dull. Simply common. Pure memorization. Without room for deeper reflection.

An example scene was shown and according to that you memorized an example sentence, or rather a template. That's all. They taught only what you could use at work.

I don't know whether it is enough: Forward ; Fire ; Reporting ;What are the losses? . It was full of such depressing statements.

For 6 weeks they told us to remember close to 2 thousand templates. Daily around 50. Majority of that were simple things like **Yes** or **No**, but sheer amount of that was annoying. I had good memory, so it wasn't a problem for me, but it seemed that some were struggling with it.

And that's how I learned English on the basic level. Although actually it wasn't enough to hold ordinary conversations with coworkers.

Later I resumed my English lessons once again and learned grammar. It's not important at work or during shopping, because even with incorrect grammar you can come to an agreement.

The point is that just knowing vocabulary was limiting me.

Diaper

Unexpectedly during training in my new place, my life became easier.

During 10 hours of classes, breaks were assigned for shorter or longer rest. In total about 2 hours. Longest break lasted more or less one hour.

At this time there is a meal, but when I'm lucky it's possible to eat a sandwich.

Moreover I was even allowed to leave my duties and nap.

Shorter breaks lasted more or less 10 minutes. There is a duty to supervise the monitor and you can't go to the toilet, but aside from that there is full freedom.

If someone likes it, he can even masturbate.

Of course I didn't have such inclinations. Problem was that I never knew when there will be a longer break, that's why it was unknown when you could go to the restroom.

Probably the only thing left is to leak.

In Japan there were diapers intended for sick or adults. If you would use them it should be fine. At least certainly you could focus on your work more.

Lately many things come to me frequently that when I was in Japan, I never thought about.

I thought briefly, that next time it would be good to buy in bulk many things and then resell to my comrades in arms.

Although of course I would have to return to Japan first and then be willing to come here again.

Anyway terrain on map here is rather complex.

Previously there was simply a wide field and now on the north and west side there are mountains, and to the south a wide plain.

Looking at the topographical map, which green wireframe didn't resemble anything, that you can see even in movies nowadays, I thought that certainly there is somewhere actually a place that may look the same.

It doesn't give a feeling of reality, but I'm assuming it corresponds to a real location. That were only my conjectures.

In my mind I'm pressing blue buttons and in reality I'm going with the flow and pressing Q for confirmation.

There is no change in the situation.

Operator's operator

It looks like I got an operator's operator position.

I don't know why it was called that, but I don't know English well enough yet. I managed however to catch Charlie and ask him when he came to deliver documents.

"Formerly we called our contractors private operators. Handling those operators is your job."

He said that next time he will buy me a beer and left.

I don't understand why he wants to buy me a beer.

They are saying "operator" all the time but what is it exactly? I wanted to look it up in the dictionary. I couldn't wait for a day off.

Here whether in classes or in the camp I'm unable to acquire it, so to be able to obtain it, I will go to the bazaar called brothel.

I borrowed a dictionary from Shawii and read that operator is

a person that is operating some machine.

I wondered whether tactical unit S is a machine, but I was more or less satisfied with this meaning.

Shawii like usual with a slightly upset face taught me English.

At the start when she began teaching me she wore clothes that revealed skin, but lately she once again dresses normally.

“Do you have enough of English?”

She says with a challenging look.

I replied that not at all. I still don't understand what she has in mind when she says that.

Maybe she just has such a gloomy nature or maybe I don't know her and I judge her unfairly? I don't really know, but I needed English, that's why I depend on her.

I feel a bit guilty, but I don't have any other way left. I'm not sure I'm doing the right thing, but maybe when I learn English I will also understand her behavior.

Anyway there is nothing left than learning it. Maybe when I will learn it our relations will change and I won't have to depend on her anymore.

Anyway Shawii says, that learning English in American style is much easier than in Japanese. Seems that in America they know how to do it, since for so many years they accepted immigrants and taught them en masse.

Village

I don't remember exactly when, but sometime during the second half of my stay in the camp cases started appearing, when I had to work at night.

Even though this was a genuine black company, night shift to

my surprise was paid. 800 yen per hour. That's why I wasn't complaining.

On the night shifts I also got a colleague for company.

According to manager's orders, every time whether we worked by day or night changed.

Man who was in custody of tactical unit C, which was on a higher level than ours P, was the manager, and his name was Dalian. It was by his orders that every time whether we worked by day or night changed.

It's true that I already started learning English seriously, but I still didn't speak too well yet, that's why I sat at the back and only listened.

It seemed that Dalian is in this camp for a second time and that middle management personnel also attends this training. After all here is the training **center** for training in our company. In fact you could say it's like a center for all training in our company.

It's true that I was assigned a manager, but my job in itself didn't change. It's just that I didn't like that in this mountainous area there were a lot of surprise attacks. You can't score points too much. Also there are more points subtracted for losses.

Points were the main reason as to why I called it a computer game. Elimination of an enemy unit gave some number of points and loss of an allied one subtracted them. And from that you got a score.

I couldn't see the total score, but in some way I was conscious of it and I tried to do things in a way, so it would be as high as possible. I think that's how it worked. There is no denying, that scores gave me motivation and a "kick" to work.

Tactical unit P I'm responsible for gets a longer break in a march.

That day there was no exercise on how to deal with an offensive during a march of a single P unit, but exercises of a common strategy for several P units.

C unit calls unit P for an assembly, so it's probably more accurate to say, that the fight is led by unit C. More or less 3 P units correspond to 1 C unit.

That day I was responsible for the right flank. Order for a longer break in a march was given by Dalian. Half of the units went on standby. Also my P unit.

Relocation from the right flank to the middle took place in a formation as if they were surrounded by a P unit, which still failed to stop. C unit in a much larger number changed position and moved into formation for a longer stop.

I call it the ring.

While half of the OOs, that is operator's operators, were taking a nap, I worked for points while eating dried fruits from Shawii that in no way resembled blackberries.

If you lower the number of surprise attacks then losses will also decrease.

As far as I looked closely through the data, surprise attacks took place only near the village that is on map.

As an exercises in a camp they are quite well prepared. Enemy is not without food.

Taking the village as a base, everyday they move around in its vicinity.

I thought that in that case it would be better to destroy the village. Thanks to that you can decrease by a large degree chances for losing points. However in this moment the stop ended and new commands came from unit C to subordinated to it three P units.

Coincidence? Could it be that everyone thought about the same thing? It was an order to attack the village. I thought so.

Again my P unit returned to the right flank.

I left behind a S unit, while the rest moved to surround the village. I went further than instructions I received. I placed unit P along the road. Differently than usual.

Order from Dalian's C unit to press the blue button.

After pressing Q for confirmation, I pressed the blue button. Response comes from the commander of unit P to confirm my choice.

Irritated that with question he is answering a question, I press the blue button again. Another unit already started their offensive.

Finally my unit P started an attack. Shooting at fleeing enemies from the village. Easy job. In a good mood I looked at my rising points.

There are still enemies trying to return fire, but most of them are fighting in the village with other P units.

Meanwhile at my place the enemy runs in a straight line in one direction. Good that he is not moving in zig-zag. You don't have to use many bullets. Enemy panics, exactly like amateurs.

Happy I looked at a place in the back.

In my memory remained Dalian's face, which was more severe than I thought.

That day my score broke a new record.

Encounter with a weapon

If someone gets used to a day off every 5th day, the concept of ordinary week is fading in him.

Actually, lately telling what day of the week it was became hard.

Nonetheless I didn't have a problem with that, so I even stopped being interested in what day it was.

For this reason, when I got an order from Dalian to next Sunday go to the hangar instead of the operation room, I panicked terribly.

I thought it was a good opportunity to show the effects of my lessons with Shawii and asked when is Sunday.

First he asked if I'm stupid, but then he calmly said that in 3 days. I think he remembered I don't know English at all. He started to move as if he was startled.

Lately he looks as if he felt aversion to me. I didn't really know the reason and I didn't care about that.

3 days passed.

I got up in the morning, went to the restroom, finished my breakfast and started wondering how to kill time, that was left for me to go to the hangar.

For the first time since I'm here I had free time during work hours. Which reminds me that in Japanese companies a lot of time is wasted for nothing.

In the end I decided to learn English.

Lately I realized that when my ear got used to English, I remember unexpectedly quite a lot of vocabulary.

I have a feeling it was all in elementary or middle school. It seems that things I learned in middle school didn't go to waste. I just couldn't connect what I have learned with my experience but I had the basics.

That's why now I mainly learn grammar. If I understand grammar I will be able to understand the context.

I have a feeling grammar was also sometime in high school. Although that's something I don't remember exactly.

I checked my watch. 15 minutes till meeting left.

In this camp there are no cellphones, that's why you can't check the time on them. Till now I didn't wear a watch on my arm, but now I got used to it.

Nowadays I urgently need a more solid watch that won't lose time.

I'm in a place where I can't from the start ask for time. I can't also really correct desynchronization and that's why I want new, precise watch.

It would be good if the clock dial was clear. It's hard to calculate the hour on digital display, if I don't look closely I can't make sure what hour it is, so analog one would be better.

10 minutes left till meeting. I started walking.

I reached the hangar 5 minutes before time.

When I went inside came the command : Attention!.

Before my eyes were contractors evenly standing at attention. Fifteen robust men.

They have loose clothes, that's why I think they are contractors.

Everyone is holding a rifle which I've seen in movies. They are probably automatic rifles.

Very weird feeling, when everyone is looking at me.

Beside them in the hangar there are three vehicles, small enough that they look as if it isn't possible for a human to enter them. They also don't have a driver's cabin, so I thought they are maybe controlled by radio or are automatic.

In their trunks various equipment was loaded. Ammunition,

pipes looking like weapons, helmets.

In the back 4 trucks, resembling passenger cars. Pick-ups. They looked Japanese. One of them was visibly damaged. You could say a wreck.

“Platoon has assembled.”

One person stepped forward out of line and said so in English. **Platoon**, that is platoon from English.

Despite that in the company it is forbidden, everyone saluted me. I don't know what's going on.

Charlie came unnoticed and patted me on the shoulder.

“Charlie, they are saluting me.”

“Because that's the only thing they can do.”

Charlie winked. I don't understand.

Sturdily built man, who took one step forward ahead of the row, with a courteous step stopped and watched me. He looked literally as if his neck stretched.

He is speaking something energetically.

Beside me Charlie translates. At this stage he didn't have to do this, since I understood it anyway, but I deliberately didn't say anything.

“I'm eternally grateful for operating during yesterday's mission. Especially for respecting our fallen comrades and the dead body of the commander of our unit”

My knees were shaking. Unit, platoon, tactical unit P? I finally understood what he means. Unit C^[4] must be a company then.

“They are grateful for operating their colleagues during the fight at the checkpoint Arata. I'm also thankful. That my good buddies survived is your doing Jap”.

Though he was speaking in Japanese, I'm feeling as if I don't

understand anything.

All the time I admired how much it resembled a real fight. How incredibly stupid I was.

Village. What about the village? I remembered Dalian's expression. Enemy behaved like an amateur, running down the road in a straight line.

I instantly forgot about what I have in front of my eyes and I felt sick. That was not an enemy but civilians.

"I said I would buy you a drink."

Said Charlie with a smile.

"You have done well"

I can't believe it.

Untitled

I don't remember what was after that.

I do remember though, that despite my low weight I lost 5 kg anyway and that I threw up everything to the awfully white toilet bowl.

Despite that I didn't annul the contract. Probably because till now it went so well for me.

I got a special day off.

I went to the brothel. I could not come up with another place I could go to. Old lady and Shawii were surprised to see me.

Shawii took me by hands and for the first time guided me to a room with doors. I cried and she embraced me and stroked my shoulders.

I regret from the bottom of my heart, that that day at that moment I forgot to pay.

They treated me so well and I didn't pay, sobbing like a fool.

Return

If my condition remained unchanged I would have certainly returned to Japan, but that didn't happen.

I wanted to make sure to what extent it was exercises and to what extent it was live action. It will change nothing, but despite that I wanted to know.

Being 99% sure that this was live action, I wanted to believe that attack on the village was an exercise, so I stuck to that other version.

I thought that even if I return to Tokyo my nausea won't cease. It didn't even cross my mind to be pleased with myself.

Thought, that thanks to my egoism I could do something like that to the villagers, that I killed civilians, is driving me to madness.

I realized I was receiving money for war. I was fully aware. I also put a signature. However shooting at projected on a monitor, running in a straight line villagers, this is not war.

Something is shouting in my head that's against the agreement, but even so it will not change anything. Even suing them probably won't work. Our company is really a black company.

On the third day I went back to work. There Dalian reminded me that it came to that, because I was playing around.

ABC

Charlie's real name is Bob Stein.

According to guidelines, during training he performs his

duties under the name Charlie.

If you think about it, the people I had contact with till now are Andrew, Ben, Charlie and Dalian.

Initials were set according to alphabet in order in which I met them for the first time.

Now I understand. The training was perfectly thought out. You never know when the blue button becomes real. I was a complete idiot to forget that.

Charlie took me to a bar.

I don't have a too strong head for drinking. After one beer I'm getting all red. Speaking honestly it still didn't taste very good to me.

In my state to be able to fall asleep I preferred to choose a gym and get tired there.

"Since when it was for real?"

I asked this, haunting me all the time question.

"From the start."

Says Charlie while laughing. It seems to me he is answering like that because of the regulations.

I don't know what's the goal of that. I have a feeling that it only delayed realizing the gravity of the situation.

It's weird that I worry about that, after all from the start I volunteered myself here for the money. Nonetheless at any costs I wanted to be sure. When could be the first time when I pulled the trigger while pushing the blue button?

Looking at my face, Charlie smiles bitterly.

"Two fights before the one at the checkpoint."

He said in a whisper.

Charlie says that commands I was giving were brilliant, that's

why they changed my training program to real work. In other words they sent me to a place that had value for them.

Apparently in this country that were fights at checkpoints. Otherwise it would be difficult to find a car wreckage.

I don't think that one had some particular value.

So then it's curious where they will send me now. Where is a valuable place for the company. I thought seriously about where I will find myself.

It would be foolish to just ask outright. In the north there were mountains? Or maybe not?

I felt the bitterness of beer. Charlie with a reddened face said, that soon 13 week-long training will end.

So much time already passed? – I thought.

I asked what's next and Charlie only shrugged.

Apparently he wasn't in a position to know that.

“All I know is that in a week you won't be in this camp anymore.”

Said Charlie with something resembling regret, but seemingly with not only that.

The closest thing that express that is my father's expression, when I said to him I'm going to Tokyo.

“Well, your results suggest that wherever they will drop you, it will be a hot place.

He said smiling and then ordered another can of beer.

Ordering a can of beer in this bar you also get a cup.

It looks weird, but all in all in Japan it's also that way with bottles. Altogether you can say that rather in Japan it's weird, that only with cans you don't get a cup.

Loss of interests

Every day I thought, that maybe I killed innocent civilians.

I lost interest in other things.

It came to that because I lacked the imagination to predict that.

At the start I tried to take up something modest like figure skating or tennis. But I quickly lost interest in it. To be more accurate no hobby appeared to me as attractive, so from the start it was doomed to fail. But I think that's normal.

If a human doesn't have anything on his conscience then you can have carefree fun. Since I started to have, I couldn't afford to be carefree. No matter how attractive entertainment it will be.

Moreover I wasn't able to fake being carefree. I could not live with this burden, but I was also afraid to die.

I couldn't handle anything, so I ran to the brothel. As a human I reached the bottom.

Actually I already noticed my fall when I was a NEET, but even the bottom has its end.

Bottom of the bottom. When it seems it can't be worse, something even worse happens. That's probably life.

Regardless, I could not get rid of my room. Every month I paid the rent. For what – I don't know.

Somewhere in the depth of my heart I wondered, whether I could watch anime again with a smile on my lips.

Hand cream

Thirteen weeks long training was nearing its end.

Day before my last day off in this country I bought a hand cream at a stall.

Admittedly I wanted a cream or some cosmetic, but in the training camp they have no such things.

On the other hand, what's interesting, they sell a lot of stockings. Probably there are some that likes them.

With the hand cream I got on the van. It's the truth that after riding in it your bottom hurts, but I already got used to it.

Since the training is coming to the end, there are a lot of contractors sitting in the van.

I wouldn't want Shawii to be taken by someone else, but oh well. I thought that in the worst case I will just give her that cream and go back.

I'm on the spot. Shawii emerges from the inside. Like last time she grabbed me by hands and we moved.

"Everything's alright? How's the weight?"

Answering that everything's alright I pushed the cream onto her.

We walked down a dark corridor, so she had to strain her sight. I saw how she was watching the container of the hand cream.

"Here. It's for hands supposedly, but you can also use it for face. It will help you for dry skin."

Shawii looks at me.

"For what?"

"For skin care."

I replied.

Departure

After all it's a foreign country, but I found it peculiar that during all 13 weeks of training not once did it rain.

Today is the first day after training, which as of last day came to an end.

All the time I wanted to find out if that village was real, but at this stage I'm not capable of knowing that or even in a position to be able to learn that.

First I will leave this place and then we will see.

They are transferring me to a branch, where there is less emphasis on discipline. That cheered me up and my nausea subsided.

It reminds me of my work in a small designer company. Despite that it was in Tokyo, it was only a branch in the suburbs. That's why only sometimes commissions appeared.

There is no comparison with those in the central, which have loads of work and more strict regulations.

Maybe it's an another country, but companies function the same way.

I hope that leaving the training center of the company will be the first step to knowing the truth.

I looked at the blue sky. Ironically the same way, as when I first came here.

I wonder who is this person, that is looking at the sky now.

I get on one of the four buses and head to an American military base.

Together with me in the bus there is around 200 people. One medium division, or in the terminology I know, six tactical units P corresponding to tactical unit C.

In the vehicle full of additional seats, I'm crammed in the seat near the window.

I wonder if I should inform Shawii that I'm leaving this country and we won't see each other again.

I assume I was the only such weird customer that came almost every 5th day. She was a very valuable English teacher for me.

I rest my face on the window and smile bitterly. Informing about parting is only an issue of self-satisfaction. Since that day I know about that. I'm horribly selfish.

The bus stops. I get out.

In comparison to our company camp, American base was incredible.

It would be fair to say that subcontractors were an entirely different league.

In the equipment of the infantry there isn't such a significant difference, but a strong impression made on me parked armored cars, which till now I only saw in the movies.

They had 6 wheels and it looked like they could transport two S units. In relation to the number of people they could load they had compact size. Surely when you get into them you are packed like sardines.

They say they are waiting for transport.

And so, as they were loaded on the transport plane, we took off.

Main cargo were just them. Inside one plane fits one armored car. Using free space by the wall, we attached metal benches and we sat on them during transport.

That's the fate of subcontractors you would like to say, but it appears to me that I wouldn't be wrong if I say that it's because civilian planes don't fly here.

When the plane shakes, then armored car fixed with a wire

also start to sway. The look of tense, swaying wires was a quite interesting, uncommon view.

I tried not to think about what would happen if they snap. It crossed my mind, that even in the movies it gives nothing.

Nonetheless it seems that transport of armored cars by plane is completely unnecessary. After all you can do it simpler by train or ship.

Surely the reason they didn't do that or can't do that lies in the surroundings.

^ 1. Everything in bold is in English in the original (more or less), limited to relevant places.

^ 2. Physical exercises are important in Japanese tradition like morning radio calisthenics, some companies also organize exercises for their whole personnel to strengthen unity, rise morale and promote a healthy lifestyle.

^ 3. Literally something like "Attention! At ease!". The thing you maybe did in your school during PE, with standing at attention and facing different directions at command.

^ 4. Well, you might have already got that, but those initials refer to actual unit in order of size: S-squad, P-platoon, C-company. Usually 2-4 of lower tier units correspond to a higher one.

Chapter 3

Something-stan and elf

Mountainous country

I have a feeling that it was shaking for whole 3 hours of flight. I didn't feel bad, but I was in transit the whole day and that completely drained me.

We got off in a place where there was also a civilian airport, though I don't know if it was as large as Japanese regional airports.

It surprised me, but in all sometime there was something in the news that in Japan there is also such place.

Passengers are transported by bus, but we went to the terminal on foot.

I walked next to the armored cars, which were to be released from cables securing them. To keep them in my memory I touched those co-passengers.

Paint seems thick.

I got off and in a hurry caught up with the rest.

In the terminal it was dark, which reminded me Tokyo. I looked at a guidance board and managed to determine that I am in one of the countries of Central Asia. It was written in English and probably Russian. Once again I was in a country with something-stan in its name.

There is one advantage in traveling with American military airplane. Of course beside lack of customs control. You can get away with exporting and bringing in whole groups of people.

Though I knew that I might have illegal goods, those dry

fruits pseudo blackberries from Shawii crossed the border with me anyway.

From there once again a car ride. This time a SUV. I don't know which maker.

Again a ride. I'm starting to have enough. If this is to be a sightseeing trip, that's not how it's supposed to look like. Well, apparently in the company there is a lack of short and long stops. At least for me there wasn't enough of them.

Country in which the training center was located was lowland and this "Something-stan" is mountainous. Anyway that's how I felt it by vehicle shaking.

Road full of curves, hidden behind a shadow of stretching out dry mountains. Unhardened with asphalt one lane road. There wasn't even anything to admire, because you can't see any lowlands. Soon only another mountain could be seen.

Is this the place, in which that village was located?

I'm riding between two vehicles. That's probably an escort. It was hard to believe that the company assigned only two S units to it. Probably at the front there are two more. Surely they will be alert even while getting off. Such long road is an ideal place to install bombs or mines.

Vehicle in front leaves behind it a thick cloud of dust. This country apparently have dry climate. I think that for Shawii it wouldn't be better.

Another 2 hours of travel passed. When I arrived at the destination it was already completely dark. I was hungry and wasn't feeling good. Next time I will hide something to eat on me – I thought. I couldn't somehow start working on those would-be blackberries.

Arrival

In mountains night comes fast. I didn't check that personally, but it was obvious to me that simply the setting sun disappears quickly behind mountains. It doesn't appear to me that this knowledge was needed for me in work, but life is not only work.

When I reached the base it was already evening, but it was such a time that without light a face couldn't be seen.

On mountain slopes there were few buildings. A lot of them looked like traditional private housing for this country, but there were also a few in western style built quickly. In any case they look more durable than prefabs.

There is one concrete building and some others, but since it was dark I couldn't tell. Anyway the scale of this place was at a glance smaller than the training camp, so looser regulations could also be expected.

I don't know if I'm here because of good results or physical state. Charlie said that this is a **hot** area. From what I know fierce fights take place here, but I don't know if exactly at present.

There is one more certain thing. I understood the reason, as to why I was assigned here. In the mountains radio waves pass poorly. So it's hard to give orders from a distance. OO like me also have to go to the next level and adapt to do their job. That's probably why. Or maybe they were afraid of wiretaps?

One way or another I was the only person that got off here. Curious where the rest 200 went. There isn't even a guide, so I have a problem. It would be good if I had at least anyone to ask in English. But who? After all in the job offer it was written that English isn't necessary.

I decided to find main quarters.

When I started to walk in the direction of a building where lights were shining the brightest, suddenly in another building

a door opened.

In the passage stood a woman. From it light emitted so you could see silhouette clearly.

“Hey Arata, come on!” She called me by name.

I turned around and went in her direction.

Silhouette and voice were that of a woman, but since I’m in the company, I never saw a woman in it. If I were to tell Charlie that, he would buy me a beer out of pity.

Confused, I approach her. I was really looking at a woman. She had blond hair and beautiful green irises, but the most eye-catching thing were her ears. Pointy.

Did I suddenly find myself in a fantasy world? I was speechless.

Her ponytail showed her white nape. She smiled and said: “The party is starting.”

Welcoming party

The place I was guided to looked like a private apartment, but it’s interior was empty. There was no furniture. They told me that usually this place serves as a conference room for OO.

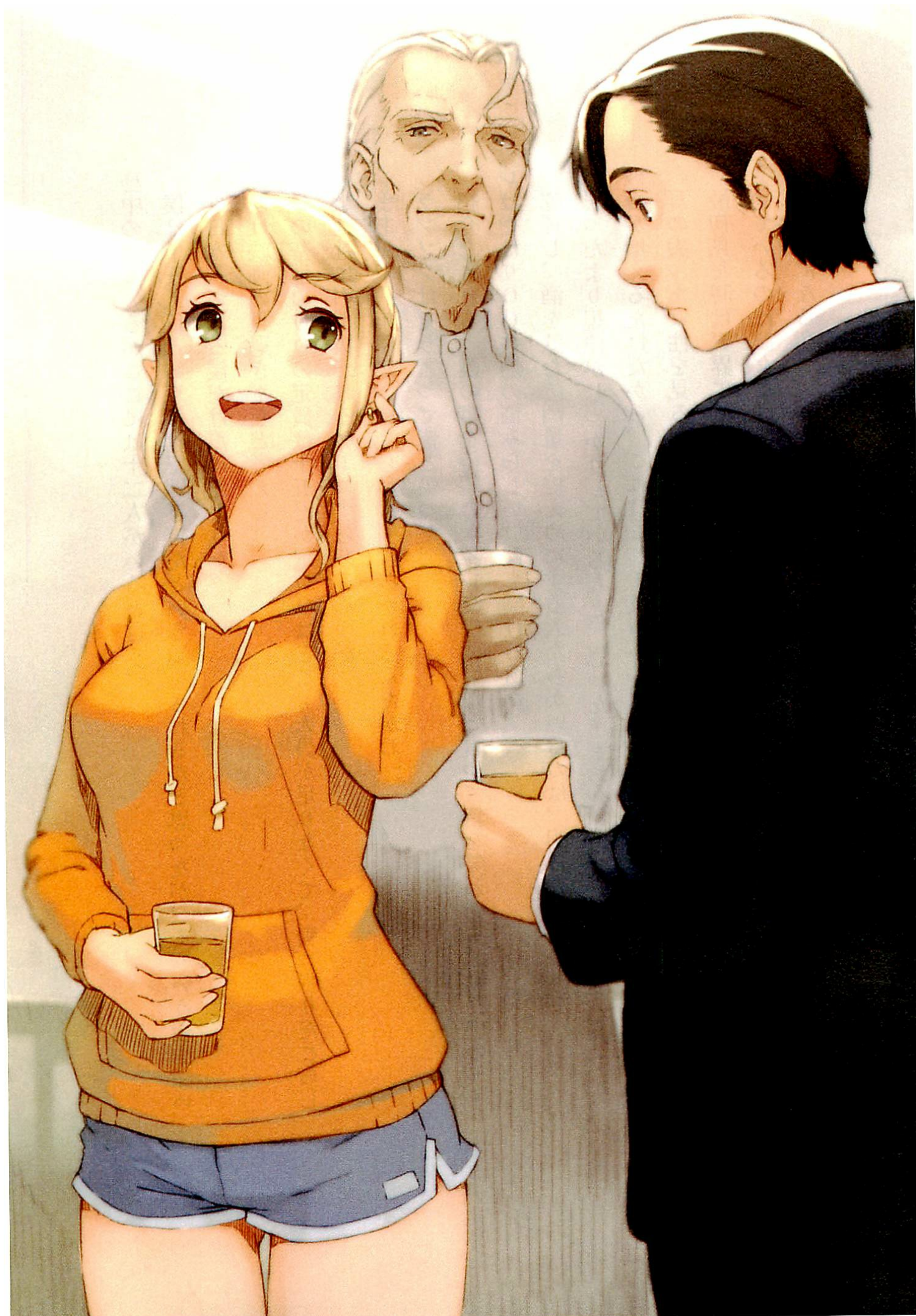
Venue of the party was made ad hoc from folded chairs and tables. There is no pizza, but there are chips and jerky. No matter what might not be here, I’m grateful that there is some food.

“Official admission to new position will be tomorrow. Welcome to Camp Morrison. I’m Lanson, manager of tactical unit C.”

Lanson as for his age was holding quite well. He welcomed me with a handshake. Patted me on my shoulders for a bit and

directed me to the others.

“There is a few more people coming, but for now we have 12 people.” He says.



So I am 13th. I was just about to make a face that it's unlucky, but apparently only me – Japanese – is so superstitious. I have a feeling that I watched too many movies.

In this OO camp personnel consist of 15 people, but there is a large demand for OO and it seems that there is lack of them everywhere. Apparently there are even cases where they are recruited to other companies.

“And anyway if yearly pay would be good, then I could also be transferred.” – said Lanson, laughing with everyone.

I'm introduced as a long expected member of a toilet shift group. Everyone laughs. Apparently toilet problems are common for all OO after all. I fully agree.

Everyone makes a toast and drink alcohol. Some of them considering their work tomorrow limit themselves in drinking.

Regulations were adhered to strictly after all – I thought. Well yes, after all if it was too slack then the number of casualties would increase, so in all it's probably good as it is.

I look at the girl with pointy ears. She looks younger than Shawii, but only because of skin. At the start I thought that I walked into a fantasy world, but luckily it wasn't a wonderland. Only she had such ears and also she was the only woman here.

“Are you interested by my ears?”

“Because they look elven.”

“As expected from a Jap, you do get it.” Blond haired girl smiles broadly. There was no doubt that they were elf ears.

She was one of those American women which loved to modify their body. She got into debt to change her ears, but when the recession came and she couldn't pay off her loan, she ran to Canada. There she enlisted in our company. She says that only for ear modifications, a student loan is the best. In

America it's normal that everyone pays their tuition by themselves, so there are also a lot of student loans. However she was with debts when the crisis began. That's when she lost her part-time job and couldn't find another. Subsequent requests for payment and penalty interest came, and that's how she found herself here. There are a lot of such cases and student escapes to Canada. In America it's also not easy.

Nonetheless hearing about those body modification enthusiasts is making my head hurt. Unthinkable in Japan. It seemed to me that even if a 3D elf walks out it won't be too moe.

Toilet shift employee

First days in the camp I spent on getting used to work and remembering camp layout. That day I even took part in live combat.

Lanson really made me a toilet shift employee. I didn't have any problems with it, it even amused me a bit.

I haven't laughed in a long time, but when I realized that I immediately stopped. It was already too late for such a mood.

Elf girl is looking at me strangely.

In this camp contractors are **route** that means they secure and guard transport routes.

I recalled second half of the training and at once thoughts couldn't leave me, if then it wasn't maybe a training. In such mountains sending orders is hard. And there is also a delay.

I'm trying to calm down, but it doesn't go well.

I eat dried fruits that in no way resemble blackberries and try to calm down. Still don't know.

This camp is for securing transport routes. It takes a very

similar supplying position to enemy village from training camp. It's function is to patrol ceaselessly assigned route, or escort a squad transporting some materials. It seems more humane than attacking a village to not lose points. Pretty normal for subcontractors in war.

Every day I'm assigned a place next to Lanson and look through documents. I don't know for which unit exactly I'm responsible, but from the point of view of a toilet shift employee it's natural that for every tactical P unit under unit C. That's why I must carefully handle a squad. That's not all. Occasionally I had to answer sounding like a monologue questions from Lanson: Jap, if you were a commander would you send soldiers on that road? Or: Jap, in the evening this area becomes dangerous. How would you organize defense?

Maybe he spoke to me, because I looked bored, but for me it was really annoying. There is also a possibility that he is paying attention to my health problems from the second half of the training camp and that's why he acts that way in my regard.

I'm trying to not think about such possibility. I don't want to be treated indulgently by people from the company.

Offensive

If there is no attack from enemy side, it's better for it to stay that way.

Opportunities to gain point during this type of missions on this kind of roads are limited. Even if you defeat an enemy, there is few points. On the other hand if cargo is damaged, losses in points are enormous.

In this kind of missions losing points is inevitable. Question is how many points will you lose, or how close to 0 will you approach. It resembles par in golf. Though personally I never

played golf.

That day I changed with my coworker, who went to a restroom, and took control.

Changing shifts for restroom also isn't so simple. First 10 minutes before you have to **call** it. Then I take a position behind such person and for 10 minutes observe the situation, how units are placed etc., and then we change. During combat it's impossible. Change of policy during combat only causes chaos on the battlefield.

Attack began few minutes after the change. A sign shows that undergoing patrol tactical unit S was attacked. Getting off the car and inspecting the area unit found itself under fire.

I immediately conduct a limited counteroffensive in the direction from which attack came, giving an order to relocate to a suitable place for defense at the same time. I distance them from the road and deploy on a looking like it's full of rocks slope.

I still don't know from where enemy will fire. I decided that for now I will carefully look around the area and determine where is the opponent. At the same time I notify Lanson and every tactical unit P about the situation. I designate the name of the attacked unit S as S1 and direct reinforcements from another unit.

I had an impression, that moving quickly with a vehicle is dangerous, so excluding located at the back unit S, I ordered everyone to get out of vehicle and while being vigilant, move quickly. As you could expect, the enemy formed ad hoc a separate squad (flying column) and began an attack on unit S2. I joined S2 with S3 and ordered still being in motion unit S4 to relocate quickly, which I also joined with the rest.

What could be enemy's goal. There isn't a military one especially. I should be able to see a reason for this attack.

I think for 2 seconds.

It's not about the cargo, but only about the attack on tactical unit S – I think. Otherwise it doesn't have sense. Could it be that his goal is a massacre? But it seemed that he is not concentrating fire.

I wonder yet another 5 seconds.

I deducted that he wants to capture unit S1. Attack on S2 is only a play for time to confine them.

Transmitting verbally my opinion about the situation to Lanson, I issued a command to unit S2 to respond with fire and S3 and S4 to bypass somehow the attack and move forward. During this detour enemy can take them into crossfire, so maybe withdraw them? It didn't look like the enemy would go with captive exchange. I think about waiting and seeing what he's up to.

S1 is sending one report after another that it's attacked from every side. I want to withdraw them, but the enemy is flanking and moving really carefully, surrounding the units. While they shoot themselves, the enemy responds with intensive fire. I have no way of withdrawing them.

I decide to establish a direct contact with S1 on an open line.

Offensive (II)

“Do you hear me? OO here. Calm down and listen. Your unit S will be captured.”

After a little while together with noise comes a sound like a paper popper and I hear a voice.

“Say what!? Shit, what now...”

I take a deep breath trying so it won't be heard in the microphone. I form a sentence in English in my head. I start

speaking.

“At present a rescue squad is rushing to help, but is held back. It will still take them a while.” Saying that I looked at the monitor.

Enemy fighting with the rescue squad is small in number. S4 is almost not attacked at all and fire blocking S3 from moving is weak, because it is focused on S2.

I hurry S4 in direction of S1 ignoring the enemy that is fighting with S2 and S3, being aware that there exist a possibility that they themselves can fall into a trap.

“Listen to me calmly. One squad is rushing here. It’s 2 km away from here.”

“Despite hopeless situation you send reinforcements. Thanks. From army of which country are you? Germany?”

“I was not a part of any army. If it’s about country then Japan. In worst case do you have any procedures in case of becoming a captive?”

“That won’t work. Subordinates will die.” He said that as if he was sure of it, but I don’t have time or language capabilities to make sure.

“Understood. When our squads will begin the attack I’ll let you know. Try to run away somehow.”

“Roger.”

With conviction I press a blue button.

I inform S4 about enemy location, giving a command to begin suppression fire. Irrelevant if they use up their ammo, for now I order them to fire nonstop.

Waste of ammunition, but such a hail of bullets can confuse the enemy about the numbers of foes. More important is that due to flying bullets that may cause losses, enemy hides behind

cover. Thanks to that a gap is made.

I wait 20 seconds and give a signal to S1 to withdraw.

S1 begins their retreat. The rest is luck. S2 and S3 repel the enemy and begin to move.

It looks like luck is with S1. They didn't suffer any special damage.

Scolding from Lanson

After I withdrew unit P and changed one other, I handed over control to original person and returned to a seat next to Lanson.

I felt enormous stress when in such a tense situation I had to speak in English, but aside that everything was as always.

It seemed though that Lanson had other opinion about this subject. After he half-closed his eyes, he opened them and shouted at me. I couldn't sit still. Lanson like a teacher points out my mistake.

"I would like to say that you directed them excellently but you risked too much and had a load of luck. Control like a brave second lieutenant who got a posthumous gold medal of congress. You understand what I mean, don't you?"

"Yes." After I said that Lanson raised his eyebrow.

"That's good." – He said and continued further. At the start I thought he was mad, but it seems it wasn't so. What he said was rather a reprimand.

Raising an eyebrow he says as if joking: "We do a job here. From the perspective of national defence force those orders were almost ideal, but... as war contractors that is nothing worth praise."

“I’m sorry.” When I said that Lanson made a sour face.

“You Japs always apologize and think that everything will pass. You are sorely mistaken. But you did good. You only have to improve your defense plan.”

I wanted to retort with a frivolous joke at least once, but my English wasn’t good enough. For a brothel the teacher was good, but unfortunately learning time was not long enough.

Eventually I said something awfully stupid: “What should I do then?”

Lanson says as though disgusted: “If you want to return to the army I won’t stop you, but it’s better if you return there with better physical condition. Of course even as an OO it wouldn’t hurt to take care of your health. In free time, weekly, train by yourself for 12 hours. You can treat it as an order, I don’t care.”

“I understand. Thank you very much.” When I said that Lanson for the first time smiled broadly. I don’t understand why he did it at this moment. Probably it’s something that a real soldier would understand.

“Good answer. If you were in the service of stars I would recommend you joining green berets.” – said Lanson while laughing. I don’t understand what he meant at the end but in any case he allowed me to leave. It seems that I can rest.

Immediately I searched for a gym and started exercises with weights for arms for stiff shoulders. On the occasion I also trained on an aerobic step. I wondered if I shouldn’t by the way lift some barbells, but I felt I would have awfully sore muscles, so I decided to climb a vertically hanged rope to develop my dorsal muscles.

At the moment I could only jump on the height of one meter. Curious if it will improve one day.

Jap

Not only in this camp, but in the whole company, people call Japanese – Japs.

I understand what it is about, that a person from Japan so Jap. But I didn't understand why not Japanese, but Jap. Which reminds me that only Shawii said as it should be – Japanese. I don't know if "Jap" is in our company some local term . By the way in this camp Jap became my nickname. Only I am Japanese here.

Quite a cruel nick. I had a feeling that if I made a mistake they would treat me as if it was because I was Japanese. Screw this.

I no longer inquired into what Jap meant nor did I ask for nickname change. I didn't have enough leeway to care about that.

Slowly thoughts about the village were returning less frequently, but from time to time I had nightmares.

My consciousness is dragged back.

"What are you doing Jap?" – watching me said the elf girl. I was after a bath, going back from the gym.

"I was reflecting on my bad control." – I said, wiping my face with a towel. In this country there is also a lot of sand, so if you don't wipe carefully, it will stick.

Elf opens eyes widely and thinks what to say. It's curious that despite language differences gestures are common for the whole world. All in all in Japan we don't look as much in the eyes between ourselves. Anyway despite her body modifications to become an elf, reactions of this elf girl were 100% American.

No well, after all she was American so it's obvious.

“I think your control was incredible. Even manager probably praised you.”

“Partially.”

“Hmm... Or maybe it's not like that? You are not native, so maybe you didn't fully understand...”

“As a contractor I made a mistake, right?”

“No, As a soldier that was correct. For them a soldier's answer is the correct answer. Do you understand? Mentally they are still from the army.”

At my previous workplace I also met with people that complained and immediately sighted how it was not like in a previous company. Only complaints, but I'm curious if in our foreign company there are also such people. Worldwide problem – I thought.

Elf girl smiled. “That's why I'm telling you that you were highly praised.”

Pretending that I'm carefully wiping my hair I covered my embarrassed face. Not that I'm super glad or anything, but it was a better filling than not being praised.

“I was told to work on my body in a gym.”- when I say that, elf girl smiles lightly and tries to look me in the eyes. I can't get used to behavior of people from our company, or rather Americans, which on every opportunity try to look into eyes of a person they are speaking with.

Elf girl says: “It's a good punishment. They are macho you know.”

“Macho? What's that?”- I asked.

Elf girl opened her mouth from amazement.

“Those that believe in an ideology, that the longer and thicker a penis, the better” – said the elf girl casually without any

embarrassment.

Before I understood that it's about manhood, I thought that if she blushed now, she would look lovely. I was thinking that I left my otaku soul in my room in Tokyo, but I felt as though it wandered up to here from there. Maybe they were fake, but when I'm near such an elf girl, I'm remembering various things from the period I was an otaku.

What am I thinking about?

Elf girl smiled. It was a rather ominous smile.

“And that's why a command to work out in a gym is a good punishment. And because you without delay answered **YES** that makes you an excellent macho. Like an exchange from a movie.”

“Ah I understand, unknowingly I became a part of their group?”

“Dissatisfied?” Elf girl seems surprised. It's me who is surprised.

“No. If I can do my job then I'm happy. Do you understand what I want to say?”

“So you like war.”

“I was also unemployed, you weren't the only one with problems.” Conversation with her was tiring. I don't know if it's my English, or if she all the time more and more strayed from the subject, or if she has such character. That I like war? There are many reasons, but there is probably nobody who at a question “do you like war” would answer “yes”. Even Lanson. I Hated war, because without my knowledge I became an aggressor.

Elf girl opened her eyes widely and watches me. “Nor war, nor can I also say that I like this job.”

“Why?”

“ ... ”

“That’s how Japs are. At least that’s how we understand it in the States.”

“... Something happened and that’s why I don’t like this job.”

“Because Lanson scolded you?”

“No” – Having said that I fell silent. Her way of asking wasn’t typical for someone from this line of work. No matter how you look at it, me and my coworkers were stripped from this kind of feelings in the training camp.

This girl is weird and it’s not only about her ears.

Elf girl wondering with half-opened eyes says: “You are not an ordinary Jap, right?.”

“...Why, thank you....”

“Exactly, this way of talking like from a movie. Can I call you Arata?”

“OK. How should I call you?”

“Normally. Sophia.”

I immediately ask: “I thought your name would start from E.”

“Could you perhaps mean a continuation of what was in the training camp? Or maybe you thought all the time about a female name starting from E? Just between us Jap, name Eva you spell as **Ava**.”

I immediately remember the training camp. Unbelievable but it seems she went through the same training program like me.

I was surprised, but from my mouth came entirely different words. My body, but mouth as though another persons: “Why Eva?”

“Evangelion is Japanese, right?”

She resembled the past me more than I thought.

Camp on a slope

From the camp where I work there is quite good visibility. That is obvious, after all radio waves have to flow well. You can see that our company treats OO as a really important persons. Is it a trend in this trade? Or maybe only this company? I don't know.

From what I heard, at the opposite side of the mountains there is also a camp and we share control area with them.

I walk along the slope. Soil is not prepared, buildings on the slope stand sloppily. It's not a permanent camp so everything is prepared anyhow. Limiting themselves to as small costs as possible is probably natural for a private military company like ours. Not only ground preparation is half-assed, but it seems that cleaning is also done anyhow. To the edges of walls that look as though wind stopped at them, stuck are lumps of dry sand. If you shake your hand they crumble and fall.

Despite that this camp wasn't in the desert it made that impression. And it's not so that there is a lack of water.

Thinking about that I look at a shining white snowy mountain peak. This side of mountains can't be seen during sunset, but then during dawn there was wonderful view.

Dawn after night shift is incredibly blinding.

Mountains are sparkling.

Lately there are almost no attacks conducted at dawn or at night. In most of cases the enemy is limited to attacking during the day. We have gear with night-vision so it doesn't make much difference but it seems the enemy doesn't have enough of them so that's the reason. And though he had terrain

advantage, night attack was for him tantamount to suicide.

... As a result of which compared to remuneration for night shift, work is light. Cool that it's much easier than in the training camp.

I was contemplating rotation. When I thought that I could relax that way for another 3 days, a tactical unit S passed by. They are probably going on patrol. I let them pass moving to the side of the road. Pretending that I'm escorting them with my sight, I watched them closely.

I am their partner from the other side of the computer, but I didn't have an opportunity to see what people are in the tactical unit I manage. I was curious.

Omitting one person everyone looked young. State of skin would indicate thirties, appearance – teens. And speaking about countenance, they appeared to be people from this country.

It looks really weird when on a civilian clothes you put on tactical or bulletproof vest. As if you put a vest to rolled-up skirt. Half of them covered their faces. It looked really creepy.

Clearly one person was from another race. Apparently the leader of this tactical unit.

Black man stopped the squad and approached me by himself.

Crap. Did I behave improperly?

“You are this Jap from OO, no?”

“Yes.”

“Three days ago it was you that had a shift right before the battle and issued us commands?”

Black man reached out with his hand on which he had a black glove. He is smiling, that's good.

“You saved us. My subordinates survived. Earlier on the radio I forgot to thank you. I'm grateful.”

Shaking hands (to which I'm not used to), I thought that it's probably the commander of unit S1. How much younger than me could he be? He made a good impression. I just remembered that on the radio he was saying that his subordinates will die. I asked him what it was about. He answered me that as a captive only him, sole American has some value, therefore everyone beside him would be killed.

Oh yes. I nodded and, in 90% theatrically like in the movies, tried to laugh. He is probably also from those machos. And in fact it was so, because the black commander smiled pleased, saying that next time he would buy me something to eat, whereupon he left.

Everyone begins their march.

One with a covered face is staring at me, but soon returns to the rest. That's how it seemed to me, but after a while he returned and told me I was like a golden eagle, and then he left.

Before I pondered what is a golden eagle, I flinched when I realized that he clearly was having a voice change. He was also relatively small.

In every country there is different common sense, but in mine it is not something that would be approved.

I shook my head and returned to reality.

Saying nothing about that, it seems that both the elf girl and the commander of this squad didn't lose their human reflexes. Or maybe it's just us in the training camp that were stripped of them? Or it was me that was so cold from the start. I had a feeling that I lost something, but I didn't worry about that. I simply sympathized with them a bit, because I know that they too have it hard.

No nonetheless buying me food or drinks was apparently a form of communication common to the western world, and eastern as well. Or maybe age-groups younger than me didn't

like that? Or maybe that are some exercises? Or maybe that's what being that macho is about?

Malicious gossip

This guy is **crazy** – I hear such things about me and they are not individual cases. Anyway everything within coworkers from OO.

Translating this into Japanese it means that I am insane. I think.

In any case Sophia, like all of us, reluctantly work for the sake of wars for money. I don't think they are crazy at all, but when they see me they stealthily leave immediately. Well, even if I thought such things about someone, to immediately run away... – I thought.

Anyway since I understood English, listening to it bothered me enough that it became annoying.

One day when I indifferently told Sophia about that, she said: "Stupid, that they call you **crazy** mean that you are outstanding."

Indeed. I thought that happy are those that can take things that way. By the way I won't say how they called Sophia behind her back, because I feel sick just thinking about it. In fact she was crazy enough to play with her body that way, but in my opinion gossiping isn't good.

When I asked what she thinks about me, she smiled gently.

Talking behind somebody's back, one way or another, is bad.

About rent

I'm worried about monthly rent in Tokyo. I got into this

business to be able to keep my modest hobbies like figurines, anime or LN, but in such circumstances I completely don't have a mood for all that.

Maybe that's divine punishment for such nonchalant stance. Nevertheless I feel resistance to giving it up.

I stopped thinking about it since the time of the training camp. I abandoned this hobby, because I asked myself what was left for me from life.

There was no answer, but I at least abandoned the view of saying goodbye to this business and military affairs.

Defense plan draft

That day, when instead of a lunch break I had a longer free time, Lanson informed me that our company got a contract for a mission with a large transport. In it protection was also included. It's about subcontracting a specific war task. In our company that was an order on an unprecedented till now scale – transport is expected to take 2 months. If he dropped the subject at that the conversation would break, but for some reason Lanson told me that I had to prepare a defense plan for the area our camp is responsible for. The rest I have to do as always so far.

So I just got overtime.

Apparently Lanson from goodwill will be coming to check how am I doing in this unexpected overtime.

Involuntarily on my face a bitter smile appeared.

This didn't look like being macho, which was in itself supposed to be a reward for work, of which spoke Sophie, the elf girl. Rather it looked like frequently encountered mistaken expression of love from superiors.

I love work. You too, right. So I can probably say, you don't have any doubts? – only words are different, but everywhere it's the same.

But if I do well, then maybe I can use that for acquiring information.

I began drafting a defense plan. Though I don't have experience in that, aside from what I did in the training camp, so I realize that it might not turn out the best.

I'm more worried about Lanson.

If my performance will be bad, it's natural that I would have to do it again. Redoing that will be a pain in the ass. During the time I worked in a small designer company in Tokyo if you had to do amendments one time, then you had to do them all the time after that. If a customer falls into this state, where suddenly nothing pleases him, that's the end.

Another line of work, but system is the same. Even more than common to every corner of the world twisted expression of superiors love during drink communication – I thought.

Conclusion – It will be very hard.

As a toilet shift employee I sat next to Lanson and pondered about the defense plan.

At present already 3rd day passed, since I started. And it was at this point when I saw tactical unit P, which I managed during the fight. They were getting on onto separate vehicles to patrol.

Main duty of this camp is securing a transport route and maintaining it. More specifically, our main job was patrolling while ensuring and maintaining security as a goal. Hardly ever tactical unit P had to temporarily increase their escort potential to help transport units.

95% of work is patrol. The reason for such an exaggerated patrol is simply not giving a chance for the enemy to set a trap.

When trap or ambush is hard to set up, then the enemy won't even pick up a fight.

And that's what it's about. No combat, no negative points. And there are no costs for ammo or funerals. That's the mission this camp fulfill. Not combat, but realization of the mission is its objective. In this aspect our company is clearly set on profit.

Despite having the same goal, meticulously conducting patrols to negate enemy attacks is more reasonable than attacking a village.

That in the training camp that didn't cross my mind – I smiled bitterly.

I thought that the village and its inhabitants weren't real. Fact that they weren't real and lack of imagination easily change a man into mass murderer. I thought about the commander of P unit, who twice made sure about the order to attack the village. I wanted to apologize.

Patrol is going according to the plan. They will soon return to the camp. Earlier another tactical unit P left to patrol another route.

You can't predict the time of regular service. Whole process is complicated, though at first glance it looks as though the patrol was planned randomly.

Looking at their route I concluded that until they receive support from a tactical unit and OO they have to make do with what they have.

Even if you change greatly current rotation it won't do anything. I decided to do it in a way that won't mess with this rotation. Instead of that I narrowed down the area of their rounds. Thanks to that the density of patrols will increase. Additionally I decreased rounds of routes not used for transport operations. If they will be needed during normal service then I will temporarily increase security there.

In addition to all that, I attached a proposition for rounds of a nearby village and establishing a friendly relationship with them, and presented everything to Lanson. That last one was probably a result of personal reflections. You can say that for personal satisfaction.

I didn't care how it would be received.

Shock

“Beautifully done Jap, that's what I expected.” – Lanson looking at the report I gave him said as if with admiration.

“Sorry if the execution is bad.”

He reads my mail that is displayed on the screen and scrolls it.

“Well well, not only rational, It's still feasible. You did it quickly. I also thought about reconsidering guarded area.”

If that's so then you should have done it yourself – I thought, but he probably wanted to brush me up. Despite his looks he is a superior who has an unusual in present times enthusiasm inside him. That's my evaluation of Lanson and it's probably not wrong.

At least he seems more straightforward than Sophia and her whole machismo.

“As befits a descendant of Imperial Japan, which didn't wage any wars for a long time. But...”

He didn't have to say more, I already knew what it's about. “But” visiting villages isn't in the scope of duties of armies or private military companies – that's how I expected our further conversation to go. It was for my own satisfaction anyway, so no hard feelings.

“But establishing friendly relationship with locals? You really fit into green berets. At least you have the disposition. I

understand. Permitted.”

I was dumbfounded.

Lanson smiles bitterly. “You didn’t hear? Indeed establishing friendly relationships is necessary. I will plan a visit in the village. I want you to go there too.”

That was the biggest shock I experienced since I joined the company.

Is my face that funny?

Lanson rolling around with laughter repeated: “So you didn’t know?”

Green berets

Green berets make me think about some elite and powerful American special unit on the level of “A Team” or “Rambo”. Not only me, but generally Japanese had that kind of view.

In reality it was different. Lanson was from green berets, so he told me a bit about it.

Green berets motto is “To liberate the oppressed”. It’s of course about the civilian populace. Their main task is reaching out to people. On military training they devise plans how to free people from oppression. As a part of this policy, they also provide them with medical help.

Of course beside that they also deal with sabotage, infiltration missions, learning languages, but primarily they constantly put emphasis on military training and reaching out to local populace.

The objective is to gain friends on the battlefield – Lanson only the word “friends” said in Japanese.

One time when Japan met with an earthquake, America under

a joking name of “friendly plan” conducted a rescue operation on an incredibly huge scale. Lanson says that’s where he learned this word.

I knew America’s army helped then, but I didn’t know it was on such a large scale. Lanson claims that thanks to that America regained trust. And though that earthquake was an unfortunate event, America realized that Japan is important.

Looking at the report I turned in Lanson said OK.

I also have to go to the village. The fact that one must act first upon things he brought to attention seems universal.

Sophie’s views

“You deny, but you fit quite well to macho. You befriended them.”

Sophia, the fake elf, as for our company, or maybe even this camp, felt really out of place. It wasn’t about the shape of her ears or that she was a woman. To tell the truth I think that this company frequently took such people in.

Looking objectively, setting aside military or ex-military people, there was a serious problem with a lack of OOs, which would operate different computers. That’s why they hired not only twisted women, but even inexperienced Japanese.

You could say that I was hired on similar basis with Sophia, though I want to point out matters in which we differ.

Sophia doesn’t know anything about our company. That the limited time for meals is sacred, or that talking to someone during meals is really rude. She doesn’t understand that.

Disgusted I look at her, thinking “Take that back”. She is surprised.

“Rather than befriended, adapted.”

“And what will you do now, when you adapted?” – asked Sophia with seriousness.

I already had enough of this conversation. During meal I want to just eat. I thought that in Tokyo I was completely different. While surfing the net or watching TV, I ate bento from convenience store. From today's perspective I was a bit slovenly.

I looked at Sophia. “It's annoying to oppose every time, you know.”

“Absurd. Rather it's an infringement of personal rights.”

True, but on another hand I get money for that, besides that, where is there a place for rights of another person in this job, when life itself is being infringed. She really looked like someone from another fairy tale, one with elves.

Not only me, but everyone from the company wondered what she is raving about.

Sophia glares at me. When I looked like this into her pupils I finally understood. I understood why, even though she is the only woman in the camp, she isn't popular at all.

For many people in the camp this elf was probably an object of contempt rather than a sexual one. I grasped that she could neither give up nor adapt, having no one to talk to, she talked to me, as we had more or less similar interests.

That's just great. I sigh.

I thought that Sophia is similar to me, when on every day off I went to Shawii. She was me, which couldn't adapt to conditions in our company.

“Okay, first let's eat. Canteen is small and time for eating short.” – I said, having in mind how I was in the past.

Sophia nodded lightly. For some reason she looks as if she

was about to cry.

I resume eating. Good. Even very good.

That were apparently food rations of American army, packed in retort pouch. It's cool that they have so many types, you don't have to eat the same thing for a month. I always imagined food in the army to be in cans, and here thanks to retort pouches they gained a lot on weight.

“Just don't think that now we are friends” – I said while eating something that I can't exactly determine, but you can probably call it spaghetti.

Sophia eats in silence. I focused on the meal. It seems that if I speak to her now she will cry. I completely lack experience in man-woman relationships, so if she cries here I wouldn't know what to do, and there will be an even more troublesome situation.

I think about something else.

I can't exactly determine what I eat because pasta is too short. It's also not penne, it's just pasta cut too short.

Too short spaghetti – that expression captures state of things the best.

With tomato sauce.

Regarding personal preferences, I would prefer if it would be a little more salty, but it's tasty anyway. Good is also a cracker, on which I put a gelatinous jam. You can eat it with virtually anything, that good. You can't say it's super crisp, but it's a little salty, so it manages.

I eat spaghetti in a hurry. Crap, it's good. So you would want tabasco. It would seem that you would be thirsty after that, but it's not that way at all.

And finally the main dish – chocolate cookie. It seems twice

as large as it should, but it's because of a large amount of cheap chocolate.

That desert was a main course was caused by calories. In itself it already amounted to almost half of the calories of the whole meal. I don't know if it's because of the cheap chocolate or too much oil, but it never happened that I managed to eat everything yet. Although if you are tired, such amount of heavy food is probably good.

Menu consisted of 3 products, but vitamins and minerals were carefully included in that. Striking is that my health is much better than when I was in Tokyo. Maybe my visits in the gym produce results.

I drink powdered coffee. I don't use sugar. There was already enough calories in this meal, if I still put sugar here it would be too high in calories and I would get fat easily. 500 kilocalories. Even if you skip half of them from the chocolate cookie, it's not easy for someone having desk job like me. That's why I deliberately try not to add sugar.

Looking in Sophia's direction I see that she ends eating her vegetarian menu. Even for a military ration, vegetarian menu is carefully selected. As you would expect from America. All in all in Japan it's probably that way too.

Sophia eats everything to the end including the chocolate cookie. What an appetite – I thought. Or rather it's about maintaining her body. She realized that I'm looking at her and watches me. In a hurry I'm trying to look for a conversation topic.

Usually I had a problem to find something quickly, but since I didn't have any priority subjects, I started a topic I didn't take up earlier.

“Why do they call Japanese people Japs?”

Sophia thinks, wiping chocolate from her mouth with an

index finger. “Hmmm. Jap doesn’t sound too good, right? Because it’s a pejorative word for Japanese from the generation of my parents and grandparents. I try to avoid it so it won’t remind about it ... maybe.”

“Maybe?”

“Well you know, everyone is using it, so I am too.”

You have to admit it’s logical. There aren’t too many people who attach importance to vocabulary, which you are using everyday. I say that I am grateful. Sophia smiled at last.

“Ah I just heard, that you are going to a local village?” – Sophia bent forward with curiosity.

I didn’t move away because that would be annoying, so I took a sip of my coffee. Awful. But still much better than powdered juice, which is usually served with a meal. It also doesn’t have a weird aftertaste.

“It was me that proposed that you know? Lanson told me that I’m like a green beret.”

On those word Sophia wrinkles her nose a bit. She looks clearly unamused.

“Green berets are a lair of machos you know. They train befriended and allied nations in America’s national interest.”

“Well, but they don’t train enemies right?”

“Yeah. They only tell them to kill each other. That’s cruel” – said Sophia looking dissatisfied.

She didn’t look as if she realized that she herself takes part in something like this. Apparently she keeps that somewhere deep in herself. For her everything on the monitors is probably a fiction. That’s also a stance I presented earlier. Liberation from oppression or citizens killing each other? Which expression is better? None of them is false but it seemed that with none of

them you could express everything.

I decided to change the subject. Sophia probably also wanted a proposition of a new topic.

I recalled a time, when I lived aimlessly in my rented room in Tokyo and decided to talk with Sophia.

Today it's hard for me to get along with Sophia.

How Lanson's killing time

Lanson's schedule for a day consist of making me a toilet shift employee. That's his time killing. He rarely takes it out on somebody else.

"If you were the enemy show me on the map where would you set up an ambush?" – from time to time he asks me such questions.

On the map there was a valley. I said that I would order to watch high ground and place units at the bottom of the valley. I wasn't particularly interested in how he will grade me so I didn't look at his face. I don't know if he is pleased. He snorted and crossed his arms.

She is probably interested, because Sophia stares at Lanson.

Accompanying Lanson during his time killing was a pain. It's hard being asked about obvious things. There are probably some that would be happy about it, but for me it was hard. I thought that I couldn't be his teacher in elementary school. Though I don't have such qualifications anyway. Anyway I was dissatisfied, but I accompanied him to gather informations about that village.

Lately I try not to think that I don't have a job, exactly because this is a job. It's about this dangerous thought that in this line of work at any time you can become a victim or

executioner. All in all not only in this business. Actually in any work it is that way. Just the level of danger is different. In that reasoning NEET is also probably one of the occupations.

If I think about it now, quite a long time I spent doing nothing, which led to emergence of many victims and executioners.

My parents were the executioners, victim was me.

Now I know that I looked for a job because I just noticed that. Only then I couldn't put it into words that deftly.

"I don't have work, because it's my work" means that there is no job for me, in which I can learn anything. Modest, yet for me a significant difference.

In any case I decided to think about it that way. I am different than before.

I return to reality. Lanson looks dissatisfied.

I want to relax so I stretch my neck and look around. Relaxing during work is very dangerous.

Lanson troubles someone else, asking the same question to another OO, which came to report.

He wipes his sweat, hesitates, points with finger and finally decide to gather all forces on high ground. Lanson looks dissatisfied. He started it himself after all, so he didn't say anything.

I decided to act like an obedient toilet shift employee and didn't say anything.

Decision-making know-how

Later I went with Sophia for a meal.

We didn't have particularly any frivolous talk, because there

were other OO with us.

Because of replacements there was more free time.

Beside Sophia and Lanson no one from OO told me that I'm **crazy** directly. Everything behind my back. Though I don't want to build relationships with people in this trade anyway. You never know when someone from us will disappear. There is no one that would spend time on building a relationship knowing it will be broken soon.

And that's how inevitably it came to that, that I ate a lot with Sophia. Also because we were both recluses, but also because Sophia partially shared my interests and had a habit of coming to me to talk.

She had nothing in common with habits in this line of work to not build relationships or to enjoy short time for meal in silence.

In any case it wasn't a human. It was an elf.

I eat in silence, but Sophia doesn't like to eat without speaking. I tried to take as big bites as possible before she started talking. Someone having nothing to do with the military won't understand that feeling. Something can happen, and in the next moment you can be called to work. You never know when you can eat next time.

"You make decisions quickly."

"What decisions?" She always suddenly blurts something, so at the start I don't know what she means.

Sophia begins eating awkwardly starting from the chocolate cookie.

"Lanson's tasks. You solve them quickly."

"Because the answers are obvious, so there is nothing to think about."

“Everyone thinks that’s amazing, right? You have some secret?”

Not really – I stop in the middle of the sentence. I noticed that other OO in the vicinity focus their attention on me. They must be bored – I thought, but beside that I have nothing to say, so I ignore the stares. Though I can’t ignore Sophia anyway. This elf openly asks about anything that interests her. She doesn’t let go. That’s why there is a relationship between us. Though if someone asked what kind, then I don’t really know.

I thought a bit while eating and answered. “Secret is that first I think about a plan and make it a makeshift leader. That’s first. Next, one after another I compare it with other plans and if they aren’t better from current leader I reject them, and if they are I make them a leader. And you can do that over and over again.”

“And if you hesitate?”

“It’s enough if the leader wins, right?”

“And pros and cons do you consider them?”

“I don’t think about them. I work intuitively.”

I didn’t like that not only Sophia but also the rest, which I decided to ignore wrinkled their noses.

“Making decisions quickly. That’s the goal right?” – making small stops between words I confirmed.

“Yes. But...” – here when you didn’t have to join words, Sophia joined them. Strictly speaking, she separated words you didn’t have to.

Apart from that I wanted to say, why in that case is she wasting time for comparing, but Sophia spoke first. “Clear distinction is important after all.”

“Yes, exactly.”

Withdrawing my irritation, to mixed rice with chicken I took bread into my mouth. Weird is that America.

Why does Sophia put her hand on her mouth and laugh. Weird are those Americans. Or maybe it's just that elf?

“Arata, you are great, but sometimes stupid.”

“That I am stupid I admit, but with this great it's a mistake.” I replied honestly and Sophia is watching me.

“And not the other way?”

Did I perhaps have a slip of a tongue? I correct myself: “I believe I'm always stupid.”

“Ah. In that case you should probably start looking in the mirror.” – said Sophia with delight, so I immediately wipe my face with my hand. On my cheek I have some rice leftovers. Indeed really stupid.

I was disappointed with myself.

Visit in a village

Like always I was tying a necktie and putting on a suit, when a familiar black guy with a nice smile approached me.

“Before I managed to buy you a meal we will work together. Sorry for the delay.”

He wanted to shake my hand. I respond in kind, trying so that the smile on my face looked good like in a movie.

“You are going dressed like that?”

“It's work after all” – I replied. If I don't tie a necktie, I can't work. I'm also a bit surprised at that. When I was in a small designer company I didn't do that, but since a job interview for this company, or even when I was already hired and later after

the training camp, I put on a suit all the time.

“Just what you’d expect from a Jap. I’m Omar. Don’t eat pork. This troop and me are all Muslim.”

“I’m Arata. Pleased to meet you. Muslims, that is Islam, right? I understand. Something else I have to watch out for?”

“Yes. You are very welcome here with us Arata. I want you to know that.”

I laughed. Indeed it seems I’m becoming intimate with machos – I thought. Omar also laughed.

Omar took me and led to the unit – tactical unit S.

This time two S units circle around the village. At the same time one unit S is being a support in case of emergency.

“Place to which we are going now is the closest located friendly village. Many from the squad comes from there.”

“I understand”

“There it should go the easiest, further away are those we didn’t have contact with before or hostile. You can break your bones.”

“So in English on something hard to do you also say that.”

“No, that’s an expression special for Japan.” – said Omar grinning and laughing. This black guy looked like a human greater than me.

And anyway if you think about it majority of this camp, or exactly squads, I passed daily apparently originated from this country.

So they hire and train locals. So that’s why they established contact before. My stupidity was getting laughable. Well, from the start I didn’t consider myself bright, but I had at least satisfaction when I understood my own stupidity. Or maybe that’s from desperation.

I felt embarrassed, but I decided to save it for my next meeting with Lanson.

Now it's time to do what is in my power.

Chapter 4

Village and angel

The one calling me golden eagle

Now I will do what is in my power.

It turned out, that it was to drag on in silence along a mountain road. I wondered if there isn't something more I could do. Well, my role will start when we reach the village – I think.

I walked in the middle of the squad. On every side march alert soldiers, and I in silence in their midst. I wanted to say something funny, but they are escorting me because probably that's their mission orders, so I resigned.

“Mister you look like you don't feel too good. Everything alright?” – said looking at me, walking next to me short soldier with a headgear. He had a voice change. Under the headgear you can see his beautiful eye color, but not mentioning that I focused on my condition.

“Alright. No, sorry, but I'm not used to it.”

For sure looking around with curiosity was suspicious and it seemed that I have a poor condition.

One soldier is surprised by my words. “Not used to?”

Probably for a soldier that was a really surprising word. After I considered what contractors could think about me, something unpleasant came to my mind. 30 year old princess in a suit and guarding her youngsters. That's practically how it looks. That's not something that I find amusing.

“So it's the first time you are marching like that.”

“Indeed. It’s weird for a golden eagle to walk on the ground.”

I remember those words about golden eagle. Once again I looked at the soldier with a headgear. He noticed that and as if in shame moved away a bit. Specifically speaking for around 50 cm. It seemed that he doesn’t want to move away for a greater distance.

“Oh yes, you are that golden eagle guy?”

“E, what?”

“It was you who said, that I am like a golden eagle.”

“Ah, yes. That’s right, that’s right...”

I wonder why he is embarrassed. It’s me who is feeling uncomfortable thanks to my lack of experience. Wait a minute, did I get something wrong?

“I am OO. Usually I don’t go for strolls.”

“I know. Everyone says you are observing the situation like a supple golden eagle flying in the sky.”

“Well sure. Map has a view from the sky so it fits. As if I was flying in the sky, quite a poetic phrase... What?”

“No, nothing.” – said the soldier, looking around from side to side. With a shrill and stressed out voice. Borrowing terminology from Tokyo: as if he saw something too moe or embarrassing^[1].

Adorable – I thought, but then I got worried. No matter how nerdy I was, new hobby in the form of boys even for me was a bit worrying. I think about walking next to walking at the front Omar. I will probably be in the way, but before I get worse... even if my behavior will look suspicious it can’t be helped.

And that’s what I did.

Mountain roads and armored cars

The camp is located on a mountain slope, that's why it's obvious that road is also on a slope. In the distance you can also see mountain slopes, so it won't be an exaggeration to say, that in this region there is nothing beside mountains and slopes. If you went like that, then behind few mountains there is a long slope and after getting down from it when you walk all the way to the plains, there stretches an enormous cotton field.

In this area there aren't even any forests and on mountain tops there lay a pitiful amount of snow. The only thing that covers the mountains is the color of earth.

From what they are speaking it's caused by altitude. When it's too high, then microbes won't multiply and in result many living in symbiosis with them trees and plants don't grow. Compared to mount Fuji they aren't too tall, but it's known that if there is no water, life won't bloom. The mere existence of life is a miracle – I thought.

Compared to the size of the mountains, living beings are small like ants. Meaning, that you can see that with a naked eye. If you go even further, then even a human hides before mountains presence. Air is clear, though today you can see everything in distance anyway.

Saying, that there is no plant life at all is an exaggeration, but this is a place where it is very hard to find grass. And trees, I didn't see at all. That's why when it blows it's known what is the wind's shape, because the sand is rolled up. Nonetheless though, you can't say that this is a desert. On mountain peaks in the distance there is snow.

Looking at the mountains in the distance I wondered about the size of the scale of what I saw on the map displayed on the OO's monitor. Maybe it's an occupational disease, but I thought

that it's precisely thanks to imagination that I will reduce accidents like those in that village. Kind of an excuse, but not entirely. Lack of imagination easily changes human into an aggressor. Now I understand that very well.

I walk along the road.

I walk.

How much more will I walk like that?

It would be simpler by car, though this area is outside the patrolled zone. I conceived this plan myself, but it turned out that to the village I will go on foot, serving also as a patrol. It's comfortable by car, but field of view and defense capabilities are limited.

In this case going on foot is indisputably better. In case of the car one rocket is enough, and even fire from rifles would kill everyone inside. While walking that won't happen. Even if everyone would die, they will do so individually.

That's why we are going on foot in the danger zone. Basic rule is that during a fight you don't go inside a vehicle.

I remembered American armored cars, with which I arrived in this country. If we had those we could move much more quickly than on foot and much more safely than in a car. I don't know what about rockets, but without doubt bullets from an automatic rifle would be stopped. Immediately mobility of infantry would increase. Reason why American forces carried in armored cars as far as such a place is understandable.

Though size of roads in this area was wide enough for a truck, driver would surely drive the vehicle in fear.

Driving down winding mountain road stretching infinitely seems interesting.

Donkey

Though we don't have armored cars, there is **donkey** with us.

Donkey^[2] means donkey, for its small size it's a strong animal used from a long time ago for moving luggage. Nevertheless due to its small size it doesn't work too well for riding like a horse. With such pride I talk about it but it was Omar who told me that.

Contemporary donkeys are mini-car robots. Width and length 1.5 m , height 1m. To a naked chassis 6 self-supporting wheels are attached. Vehicle moving in zigzag. Highest speed per hour is 10 km. At the top of the chassis there is nothing aside from a luggage platform. On the luggage platform there are loaded and thrown on ammo, food and gear of tactical unit S, that is one squad, which is stored for later use. In this aspect it really is a donkey.

Squad leader was holding a remote controller, usually for following, that is from a remote control it moved all the time to be at a distance of 1m. Official name was Special Car for Transporting Unit Gear, but diminutive in honor of its four-legged senpai it was a donkey. Donkey is not using armor, but is very useful for infantry. Since I couldn't hold a gun, donkey had on him all the equipment. If not for him I would probably be out of breath, even before I would get to the other side of one mountain.

Donkey is following the squad leader, Omar. If Omar stops so does he, if Omar runs, he increases his speed. If he walks backwards then of course donkey also starts going backwards. In this area he is moving in a funny way. To be more precise, since I'm in this company not once did I thought about this word, but he moved adorably. I like this donkey.

As far as I recall, from up close I'm seeing donkey for the second time in my life. First time was in the training camp, on the day when I learned that those weren't exercises. When

Omar saw, that I'm looking with curiosity at donkey's movements he said seriously:

“You didn't have donkeys in Japan?”

“There weren't... probably were, but I didn't see. Even on TV.”

Omar stiffly said that indeed outside American forces he heard, that their practical use is doubted.

Omar

I don't know how is Omar from the point of view of an elf, but from the point of view of a man, or Japanese, or human, against expectations he looked like someone who you could respect. Marching at the front he is teaching his subordinates when we are in safe zones.

After he asks someone what he would do in his place, he instructs that here you should do that. Lanson did the same with me. Additionally he acts amicably without sarcasm.

He makes a positive impression, or maybe he just doesn't hide with his honesty. In this regard Lanson is different. Maybe sometime something bad happened to him, but the part for which you could respect him is thoroughly hidden.

We are still marching along mountains. I can still go, but return would be boring – I thought. Donkey still faithfully follows behind Omar.

“I think that asking about such things is very rude, but...” – said Omar, ordering a short stop to his subordinates.

I nodded. If he is putting it that way, then he probably wants to ask about something personal.

“Did you really not work in the army before?”

And yet, you can feel from a kilometer that elf girl – I

thought, before I considered the answer. Not only in our company, but probably in every business, butting in into others affairs is a taboo. Smiling for another reason after a while I answered:

“Certainly not. As you can see.”

Omar makes a surprised face. He looks calm, though he widened his eyes slightly. He looked so surprised, that I felt the need for additional explanations. I thought that with this nice guy everyone would want to have rather good relations.

“Many OOs didn’t work in the army before. Not only me. I didn’t hear the details, but manager Lanson was from military.” – when I said that, Omar nodded shortly.

“Yeah, that I know.”

If he knows, why is he asking – I thought, but it seemed that he has something else on mind and he continued.

“It’s about you. I’m very surprised, that you didn’t work in the military earlier.”

“I think, that I don’t look like military personnel...” I took out the collar from the suit and fluttered it.

Omar smiles bitterly. I know, that he speaks when he chooses appropriate words.

“Command was like a professional. Actually it was even ideal, in which many commanders and soldiers aims. That’s why I was surprised.”

Maybe he was surprised, but I also was surprised on those words.

I think.

I wonder deeply.

When appropriate word doesn’t come to me I shake my head. I can’t think of anything, so I say:

“Oh yeah?”

“Enough for my respect” – a short reply. He looks at me with a look as if he just saw some miracle.

“I’m very happy, that you hold me in such high esteem, but what I said is the truth. Until this moment I didn’t even hold a weapon.”

“Too bad” – he said with actual conviction, that it was *too bad*.

Before I managed to apologize, Omar spoke further:

“If you came here earlier... If we weren’t a squad of a private military company ... you would have a medal a long time ago and could have any rank you want. Terrible shame, that this didn’t happen.” Omar concluded the stop.

Once again I’m surprised.

What ability am I supposed to have?

Mountain road makes me think of a walk in a dense and rampant wilderness, but in this country the region doesn’t fit this image at all.

Mountain roads in this country are on slopes, build almost horizontal they stretch across many mountains, so you can go anywhere with them. Comparing to Japanese mountain roads, it’s a shame there are no negative ions, but it’s a plus that there are no mosquitoes. I think, that the landscape is beautiful in both cases.

High in the sky with stretched wings, predatory birds are flying. Maybe they are golden eagles – I thought to myself.

Before we reached the village I wondered all the time about what Omar told me. Luckily without complaining I managed to get to it. Or maybe it’s thanks to Omar’s caution, who made many stops.

In any event I couldn't come up about what ability I have. From NEET, through small designing company, up to unemployment. Honestly speaking, I thought my life is taking a nosedive, and here against expectations I'm praised just like that. Though speaking honestly it's not like I wouldn't be happy if someone told me I'm good in pressing a blue button, it's just that I have a feeling that anyone could do something like that.

Normally thinking, telling someone that he is good in pressing a blue button is an euphemism for making fun of him. But since it's Omar that said that and in a completely different context, as a praise especially from him I think it makes me happy.

I smiled bitterly at a thought, that it actually was like that. It seems that I like this Omar quite a lot.

Visit in the village

Village to which I'm going to is in a valley. There was no need to build it on a slope like the camp due to radio waves. It seems to me that people want to live on planes, so that was probably normal.

One more important thing. On the bottom of the valley there is water. There is no visible river, but there are groundwaters. You just have to dig a well and water will appear. If you look, at the bottom of this valley you can see a bit of rarely encountered elsewhere greenery.

On the mountainside on the slopes, rocks are accumulated, surrounding something in a shape of a field, so that the wind will not blow away the soil.

On the thought of agricultural terraces, I had a feeling I saw something in common with Japan and smiled involuntarily.

Everywhere you make houses from flat stones the same way.

There are also many of them in the camp, but here every one of them gave off the same feeling.

“Why are you smiling?”

“I remembered Japan a little.”

“Japan was such a place?” – said Omar. In Japan he probably was stationed in some American base. Or like Lanson took part in the friendly plan.

“We have fields like that.” – saying only that I moved keeping myself next to Omar.

Many of Omar subordinates took off their headgear and are rejoicing at their reunion with the villagers, which came to greet them. I was surprised at this picture. That were women. This not small amount of soldiers were women. I’m repeating myself to highlight the weight of this discovery.

“What’s so surprising?” – said Omar opening his eyes widely. I thought, that I can’t say after all, that I didn’t notice walking all the time next to them. I decided to say something that would sound believable:

“Ah no, I thought that Muslims don’t take off their headgears.”

Omar nods laughing.

“True, but... we are no longer in medieval times. Moreover I also don’t wear a turban. Not only Christianity modernized itself.”

“Ah yes? I apologize.” – when I apologized, Omar shook his head.

“No need. In your words no malice can be heard.”

“Thanks. To tell the truth your words are nice too.”

Omar was laughing, showing his white teeth. I also smiled.

When I looked, I saw a village chief or maybe a village elder, who had a goatee. He came to us with the help of two people. Me and Omar lowered our heads.

Instead of introducing himself first, the old man with a goatee said while watching us closely with a glint in his eyes:

“What were you laughing about?”

I was a bit surprised that his eyes were blue. And also, that additionally he speaks in English just like that. There is nothing strange that he used English, since this language still existed long before my birth, but surprising is that someone from older people omitting Americans speaks normally in English.

I pointed at the field.

“That field. It reminded me of a similar place from the place I’m from. Very distant place.”

“Chinese?”

“No, Japanese”

“Is that so?” – he said, whereupon he greeted us and started walking

One of the helping him people, who looked like a respected individual said:

“Welcome in the tribe.”

That was probably an official greeting in the village.

Tribe

Tribe in English is **tribe**. In Japanese you translate tribe sometimes as an ethnic group. At that time I thought that tribe is a proper noun.

Proper name for the tribe leader isn’t a village chief but tribe chief or probably more precisely, a patriarch. Though all the

time I thought about him as a village chief. Differences between a patriarch and a village chief I realized a bit later.

I enter the largest building in the village. It can't be said that it's big, but the room is large enough that inside it 10 adult males could sit cross-legged in a circle. Me and Omar were also invited to it.

I sat closest to the exit at the lowest seat in the house. In Japan to guests you usually grant the highest seat. So it seemed weird to me then, that here it was the lowest.

On the floor a gorgeous carpet was spread out, on which everyone was sitting. There was nothing that resembled a table. Perhaps a skylight? From the ceiling protruded a shining plastic bottle. Bright like a lamp, but it was a plastic bottle.

Sitting cross-legged on the highest seat patriarch speaks:

"You are messengers from America?"

When I look at Omar I see that he is silent. This is probably my turn.

"I'm from the camp. Indeed employed by Americans." – to be precise I explained.

Patriarch nodded.

"Did we not give you enough soldiers. What else do you want from us?"

"No. Nothing."

Not only the patriarch, but many of the people are a bit startled. Before he said for what did we come in that case, he said simply if it is maybe to become friends. Exactly that, so there is now nothing that I should say. Patriarch spoke.

"What next when we become friends?"

"Nothing. If there is something then it's only so you won't attack us."

“We send soldiers. Do you think we would attack our people? There is nothing to worry about.” – said someone else. Ah yes – I say with understanding in my mind.

Only for Omar English is his native language, but he stayed silent all the time. Remembering for what I came here, but also partially because silence was starting to become awkward, I spoke:

“Of course. I’m not worried about that. Probably some sufficient reason would be needed, that’s why I said that.”

“What do you have in mind?”

“That’s why I’m saying, that beside friendship I don’t have any other intentions, or reasons, or orders.”

Watching me closely man with a piercing gaze exchanged glances with his colleagues and then looked at me and said:

“In that case it can be said, that you came here for fun.”

“I came to make a greeting.”

“So in Japan it’s done like that?”

“I’m not sure if only in Japan, but when someone moves to a new place then he goes to say hello. If he changes his job then he does the same.” – when I said that, patriarch laughed a bit. Atmosphere immediately changed. Everyone was smiling. That was the difference between a village chief and a patriarch. Completely different authority.

Patriarch speaks:

“I understand. It seems that in Japan there is ustari.”

“What is that? I don’t understand the word.” – I honestly asked. If you pretend that you understand something in a foreign language then later it can result in unpleasantness. Once when not understanding I nodded, Shawii started to take off my pants.

“Common sense”- said patriarch with a friendly voice.

“Common sense, right?” – after I nodded, everyone aside from Omar was laughing.

“America doesn’t have common sense, but now I saw that Japan has. It pleases me immensely.”

Patriarch really said it with satisfaction so I involuntarily smiled.

“I’m sorry about the late greeting.”

“True. Late. Too late, but much better than none.” – said sensibly the man with a piercing gaze.

Though in this village everyone had such gaze. In other words I couldn’t determine who said that.

“Well much better. It would be good if you ate something. Tastier than those pseudo spaghetti.” – said another person.

They know more about us than I thought. Laughing I said my thanks. Immediate return would be to speak honestly tiring. I want rest.

Patriarch was in a good mood.

“It was you that lately saved my grandchild’s squad, right?” – he asked.

Omar from the side whispered to me , that it’s about his squad.

Me... oh – I nodded.

“No. Alone I couldn’t make a correct decision. I sent help, but I said that depending on the situation it’s better to surrender. That was bad judgment. Thanks to him, Omar, it somehow worked out.” – when I said that, patriarch smiled broadly.

“I know. Also sergeant deserves thanks. Decision about not surrendering was without doubt wise. I heard thought, that it

was you who decided to send help despite the danger. Heroic feat.”

While I wondered that you don't often use such statement, though not to the level of an elf, I saw that Omar nods strongly.

“That's right. I'm indebted to this Jap, but he is also a very decent guy.” – said Omar, making me embarrassed.

Patriarch looks pleased. He is looking alternately once at Omar, once at me.

“You don't look like military.”

“You have abilities for military affairs.”

“That's why English isn't beautiful. A hero. Maybe not a warrior or soldier, but you have something significant in you.” – said cheerfully patriarch, after which he instantly turned serious.

“But mister guest. I don't know how it is in Japan, but here there is a custom that when you greet someone you bring a gift.”

“We brought large amounts of food.” – I said and patriarch nodded lightly.

“No. Enough of that pseudo spaghetti. In this month, at 25th in the evening come again with a welcome visit. Then we will tie our friendship. I'm not saying to go as far as bringing vodka, but Budweiser would be welcome.”

Omar makes a very confused expression, so I say:

“Only, that well... religion allows drinking alcohol?”

Patriarch laughed.

“It's not middle ages. My tribe are simple people. Until the fall of USSR they didn't allow beliefs, and mosque served for storing materials. It's hard to say that everything already returned to old times and it probably won't. Listen, necessarily

bring that Budweiser, alright? And if you can, bring Omar with you.”

“I understand. I will surely do that.”

I already wanted to say, that if he wants I can bring also vodka, but I wasn't sure that they have it in the camp, so I limited myself to nodding. It was sad that the patriarch knew more about the camp than me.

After Omar straightened his back, I said:

“Can I ask about one thing? Why 25th?”

“New moon festival.” – immediately answered the patriarch.

I nod and say that I understand that they need the alcohol for the festival. Patriarch and the rest laughed with satisfaction.

Rest in the village

After the conversation and a meal with the patriarch, I found some spare time and walked for a bit outside. As a guide naturally there walked with me a typical for this village man with a piercing gaze, turban on a head and held in a belt dagger. On his shoulder he keeps American, though with a different shape, rifle. He sat next to the patriarch and was the one that assisted him during greeting, so I thought he had to have quite a high position, though I didn't have any particular clue about it.

I didn't realize this, but according to Lanson, Japanese don't have a nose for social hierarchy. I thought that we just don't distinguish, but maybe it actually could be like he says.

During descent into the valley, the village at a glance seems to have more or less around 100 buildings. On its edge private houses and agricultural terraces can be seen. More concretely not rice fields, but fields. They really resembled Japan, or

maybe I wanted them to resemble. One way or another my sight is drifting in their direction. I don't know what are those covered with lush green leaves vegetables, but they look tasty.

When sun started to set, the border between shadow and lighted places was much more clearly reflected on the earth's surface than in Japan.

"Why are you constantly looking at the fields?" – asked directly accompanying me man. His English was probably more or less on my level.

I answered, that because I feel a bond with them.

"Ah yes." – he said, after which he sat on a nearby rock.

"Since you are performing a reconnaissance of the village, then maybe it's better to go more into its central parts?"

"Today I came here with a hope that I wouldn't have to do that."

After this exchange I leaned my back against the rock he sat on.

When I looked in front of me I saw a person from the company that was approaching. It was the one calling me golden eagle.

She took off the fabric covering her face and hair, and watched me. Skin color resembled Shawii. She was a woman, so she didn't have a piercing gaze. She looked rather very young. Sophia, that elf, also had a childish face, but this one looked even younger. I wondered if regulations pertaining to age in our company are all right, but all in all it's a black company, so I had a feeling that pointing it out won't do anything.

Anyway, person in front of my eyes didn't in any way look like a hardened in combat soldier. Even leaving aside OOs, it looked like it was rare in our company's policy to hire people that have experience in military. Maybe there was something

in this, or maybe not.

Soldier with a childish face looked at me with a slight embarrassment.

“Thanks Jap.”

“For what?”

“You saved my daughter.” – although the boatman is on the rock, he threw me a lifeboat^[3].

Hesitantly I nodded and still being in shock asked if he is a parent.

Golden eagle nodded. Cut short hair was lovely, but at the same time they had in them something cold. Inevitably I am looking at her with pain.

“Your orders saved me.” – said the golden eagle.



I smile bitterly.

I spoke, thinking about how many times today I used those words:

“It’s thanks to Omar.”

“Everyone says you fit to the post of OO. Other squads too.”

I thought that today I’m praised often. Thought while I understand the reason I don’t know the cause. I don’t understand what makes me better.

Child-faced soldier watches me with widely opened eyes.

“You are not happy?”

“I’m not happy when I think that children took part in the operation.” – I answered.

I remembered my order to shoot at the running villagers. What is different now?

“Japan is a decent nation.” – said the boatman from the rock, golden eagle’s father.

Ignoring those words, I couldn’t look directly at golden eagle’s face, and covered my eyes with my hands, embracing my whole head. I recall the village. It occurred to me that nothing is different. In my ignorance I still conduct an operation and then have a good mood. That I am outstanding? Idiotic mistake.

“Why does the company hire even such children?”

I thought, that maybe because of cheaper hiring costs. Stingy company, but you have to admit that certainly they operate with money very accurately. Sometimes I worry, thinking about the circumstances of my employment, but in the end surely I also was chosen from several dozen people. Now I understand the necessity of that test, which I experienced and on which most failed, thinking whether to pull the trigger of

the blue button.

“Politics.” – said the soldier’s father.

I moved my hands a bit and looking at him asked:

“Military company meddles with politics?”

“That’s right.”

Soldier’s father isn’t responsible for this, but not hiding my anger I said:

“That is in many ways an aberration.”

I’m angry at myself. I’m criticizing political actions of the company, yet I myself clearly do that, throwing an idea to visit a village with an objective to establish friendly relations.

I thought, that it’s not the first time. Understanding superior and his idea man. That’s enough. And so a lovely girl in front of my eyes becomes a soldier. If the situation was a bit different then also I, sitting next to Lanson could say that I’m not responsible for others.

Imagining that I could say that, from nervousness I felt my mind go blank. Cheating my own stupidity, I can’t resist the feeling of turning the whole world around into an enemy. From Tokyo I traveled a long road up to here, but now I am considering leaving this company. It’s already much too late, but it’s good that at least now I realized that. I’m leaving immediately.

Everyone’s fucked up. Me, this company, this village, this country, America. Everyone irresponsibly thinks, that it will go well and in that way they create problems, which later they deepen even more. Soldier in front of my eyes is a result of that.

Enough! – I think.

I realized that I myself am taking part in this. I have a feeling,

that lack of imagination causes unconsciously evil and this evil, which cumulates, makes the world.

I won't take part in this anymore. Since the attack on that village staying in this company was a mistake. I unnecessarily searched then for evidence that I am innocent.

Someone grabbed me by my shoulders. I returned to my senses. I noticed that the man from the rock is holding me.

His soldier-daughter watches me with worry and moved her face closer.

"You have an expression as if you would destroy everything from anger."

"Everything alright?" – asked the father.

"I'm sorry" – I answered.

They were in a much worse situation than me, so there was nothing left for me other than to apologize that I am making them worry.

"I was angry."

"About what?" – asked calmly golden eagle's father.

I bit my lips to not let my voice shake and said:

"About the fact, that a child becomes a soldier."

"Japanese are really decent. Or maybe it's you that is decent?"

I stay silent. The father shifted his position, jumped from the rock and said:

"What's your name?"

"Can I tell father?" – said with her girly face with genuine enthusiasm golden eagle

I nodded. The girl stretching, whispered my name to her father.

I didn't understand what would be the difference if I said my own name, and this carefree childish impulse needlessly upset me.

“Arata, father.”

“In this country that means dawn.” – he said.

I wanted to say that Nitta – you write as 新田 read as Arata, but I didn't know how to say that in English, so I stayed silent.

Return journey

Our return journey has passed a bit faster. We hurried not because, we wanted to be back before dinner, but because with the darkness it becomes dangerous.

Lately, there were few enemy attacks during the night, but we had night-vision goggles, which were transported by the donkey. Despite that there weren't enough of them, and hence moving speed in the dark falls and chance of tripping or falling rise.

That's why it's good, that we dealt with it quickly. Even if we don't make it back to the camp before dark, it's enough to reach the camp area, which is known better.

I moved according to OO's instructions. Taking into account shifts, this tactical unit S was probably operated by Sophia. Imagining what expression she has relative to given instructions, the trip passed much more pleasantly than I thought.

I wonder about whether to apologize to her next time for my harsh stance. Maybe talk about anime – I was thinking. I feel a bit of regret about all that, what I left in Tokyo. Good, that I still paid the rent.

Walking next to me Omar was silent for a longer time, but in

the end he stealthily glanced at me, after which he honestly said:

“Patriarch and the rest were praising you.”

I thanked him for his kindness. Even if I would return to Tokyo, I will remember him.

“I’m glad that you were also judged fairly Omar.” He laughed a bit and said “If I could be your friend..” which moved me.

“I would be really happy, if in such place we can become friends.” – I answered. Omar, very happy, laughed and nodded.

We didn’t shake hands.

We are watched by golden eagle, who just returned to child-faced soldiers. I gulped. I wondered why, and then Omar’s kindness calmed me.

Friends are a good thing.

Attack

In the next second I was thrown onto the ground.

Golden eagle was pressing me down.

Before I managed to react, I noticed lying face down on the ground Omar.

I heard a popgun. It was a sound I heard earlier in the headphones. A few seconds passed before I realized that this is a sound of real shots.

“Enemy is attacking.” – said someone. Maybe Omar. Or maybe they were my words.

I heard an unpleasant sound of a bullet hitting the donkey. I look at Omar. He is making some signals with his hands, but I don’t understand what it is about. He looks at me and waves his hands. I see only the golden eagle who looks at me and says to

me to run up to Omar. She runs across the road and comes up the summit. I run out in a hurry after her.

Donkey was following Omar, but now it fell from the slope. I thought that it can thereby give away Omar's position, but the donkey after getting hit by a bullet overturned and in vain moved it's legs from right to left. It scatters ammunition, food and helmets down the valley.

It seems to me, that the enemy focuses for now on firing at targets that stand out, which rather isn't too smart. Thinking that I wouldn't do that, together with the girl I managed to jump behind another rock.

I see Omar, but the enemy doesn't see him.

I assumed that he must be attacking against the setting sun, from relatively high situated place.

Omar clings to the rock and press the wireless call button attached to his chest. Surely OO starts to issue orders. If right now there isn't a restroom break, it must still be Sophia.

I was afraid to lean out, but thought about her orders were even more frightening. As a OO Sophia doesn't have a bigger imagination than me. And for that reason there was a chance, that she will force something that despite looking reasonable according to the map, on site wouldn't make sense. That's why I ran.

I jump behind the same rock as Omar.

"Change me."

Omar in silence nodded and gave me a short-wave radio. I put on an earpiece on my ear and call out:

"Sophia, how is the situation!?"

On the other side of the receiver I heard a gulp. Today it's contagious.

“Arata! What are you doing there...”

“Please take a good look at the deployment on the table. Today I’m in the vicinity of the village. Though I was only in one place. Okay, forget it, what’s the situation?”

I felt that for a while she stared at the monitor. The fire stops. The enemy probably is searching for us with a sniper scope.

“It seems that they are attacking you. Enemy numbers unknown. How are you feeling?”

I was disappointed by Sophia’s answer. After all I already know that. I think for a while and answer.

“It’s a sniper fire. There are no casualties.”

“Good that the opponent is so poor at shooting.”

“Praise be to them for that. How much time will it take for reinforcements to arrive?”

“If they will move cautiously then about 2 hours, but if they would hurry then 30 minutes, though probably Lanson won’t allow that. He is watching out for traps.”

That was understandable. The enemy learned from my previous actions and he can use that against me. In any case 2 hours is too long. I came to the conclusion that reinforcements aren’t an option. This time a lone tactical unit S must somehow fend for itself.

“Okay, thanks. What is the map code of the location I’m at?”

“What?”

“Upper right corner of the screen you are looking at. Map code of the map.

“Map code M24E7.”

“Thanks.”

I turned off the transmission and passed the short-wave radio

to Omar. I'm incredibly nervous and I'm fully aware of that. I'm completely trembling in fear. I feel that sweat is trickling from me. I had to do what always, however the feeling is completely different than in an air-conditioned office.

Omar looks at me.

"OO's instructions are a defensive fight, but..."

"Reinforcements will arrive in 2 hours." – I answered.

Omar humbly nodded and said:

When it gets dark we will be able to use that. Then OO will give us pointers. Until sunset there are 52 minutes left."

I nodded. Rule number one in case of a sniper is to not lean out, which I learned in the camp. Sophia makes textbook decisions.

I look at Omar.

"We already saw this somewhere, right?"

"Yeah , I remember."

Omar checks his weapon and I continue:

"I think that now it will be the same."

"Me too."

Omar nodded. We both smiled a bit.

I'm getting nervous. I lost the feelings in my lower half. I probably wet my pants – I thought. Waiting for Omar's move, a desire to check if my testicles are still attached overcame me. This time I'm in it up to my ears. Not as an OO now.

Every second drags on. Every may have a value of golden eagle's life.

"Arata I want you to start acting as an OO."

"I don't have equipment!" – I said quickly, but in my head I

already was drawing myself the surroundings based on the map code. From the previous conversation Omar too deduced as much and said quietly:

“It’s not the equipment that gives orders. Besides I only mean this squad. You don’t need a computer. Do what you always do.”

I exhaled. I know myself that I’m getting tense to the limits of absurdity.

“First time I am working in a place where I can get a bullet. Don’t expect miracles.”

“Copy that.”

When I wanted to wipe sweat with my sleeve, I realized that it’s awfully dirty.

I wipe sweat with my sleeve and rise my sight. I have in front of me an image of pressing the blue button. Every time it was the same. The difference was in whether I actually saw it or if I tried to not look at it. I said how I see the current situation as an OO:

“Enemy’s goal is doubtlessly to grab captives. I think that while snipers are holding fire, a separate squad will get behind us.”

Omar nodded. He seemed to not be as nervous as me and said about their situation:

“For them it would be better if they lured us and then attacked.”

I nod. Luckily the enemy made a mistake.

“Luckily they aren’t used to combat. Maybe they don’t have a sufficient amount of weapons or people. It must be assumed that they are avoiding exchanging fire from up close.”

Omar looks only at me. Child-faced soldier also looks at me.

Apparently everyone looks at me. Omar said:

“What’s the OO’s decision?”

I immediately answered:

“Though the enemy is few, without doubt they hold advantage over us. We will retreat in the direction of the village. Our target will be the bottom of the valley without crossing the road.”

“Crazy, but I understand.” – said Omar showing his white teeth.

I already heard it many times as one of the terms, with which I was gossiped about, but in Omar’s mouth strangely enough it sounded like flattery.

I smiled, and the child-faced soldier made a serious expression and said to Omar:

“Arata is like a golden eagle. He isn’t crazy.”

Laughing Omar says:

“That is brave and reckless.”

Child-faced soldier made a pouting expression and withdrawn, but I wondered about something else. Maybe gossiping about me that I am crazy was a flattery. Maybe it had a meaning, that in Japanese the word *yabai*^[4] was responsible for. If it was like that then it’s my fault – I thought, though now I’m not in a situation in which I could apologize. So I limited myself to a bitter smile.

Omar looked at the slope, considered my instructions and said:

“If we will be careless there exist a possibility that we will fall. At the bottom of the valley it gets dark fast.”

“That’s right, fast. Instead of calmly waiting an hour until the night comes, it’s better to go ahead and invite it ourselves.”

Omar nodded.

“You are a poet. Okay. I want to gather night-vision goggles. They make a big difference. I don’t want them to capture the donkey. Team B you will be support.”

I grabbed Omar’s shoulder, who was just about to run out.

“No, Omar! We don’t know where the snipers are. Even with suppression fire it won’t do anything. Let’s get rid of luggage.”

“Good idea.” – says Omar gently sliding from under my arms. I didn’t release him.

“But I don’t plan on getting rid of people.”

“I understand.” – saying that he took out a grenade and started giving out orders to his subordinates using the microphone. He throws the grenades. They fall in front of the donkey. Grenades around the donkey explode. Explosion rapidly changes the pressure. My ears hurt. I can’t hear anything, but relying on my sight I run out with a wobbly step. Everyone in one moment go out from behind the rock and run towards the valley. For now the next target is another rock.

Here we are for some time fired upon.

If we returned fire then the enemy could succeed in cutting our road off, but in this case there is no sign of that.

Escape and retreat

During an escape attempt there exist a danger that allies will disperse, but Omar instructed the subordinates so wonderfully, that there was not even one deserter or a person that would stop running.

It occurred to me, that I only gave small advice and that my reputation is a result of Omar and his care about people. I’m not worried about that at all. When this is over I have the

intention to resign anyway.

Omar looks too occupied, so I checked if my ear already receives sounds normally and decided to help him. Of course while fleeing the whole time.

“I will take care of a part of the squad.”

“Take care of C only.”

“Alright.”

After this exchange I took command over 1/4th of Omar's teams. There are 4 teams, so over one. Recalling team C we run from one rock to another. Golden eagle – a lovely girl, followed next to me.

“I am the leader of team C.”

“Name?”

“Djibril.” – said the child soldier embarrassed for some reason.

“Like Gabriel, that angel?” – I said remembering anime. It probably irritated her, because with a childish face with a lovely girl's expression she said:

“Djibril in our religion.”

“Sorry. Djibril. If you go from the village in the direction of the valley, according to the map on the slope there is a hollowed out place, something like a plane. We will retreat there. Omar with the rest also plan on going there.

“That area was a playground when I was a child, but a hollowed out place... ah!”

Djibril calling even a younger than her soldier, made a face as if she remembered.

“What sort of place is it?” – I asked.

After she wondered with a reddened face what to say, she said

as if confessing:

“According to the patriarch that is a place in which an evil djinn lives. That’s why we didn’t go there even once.”

“I understand. Only, people with rifles are much worse than an evil djinn. We will borrow from that djinn some of his space.”

“Alright. Only...” Djibril with care hugs from behind looking at her child and thinks.

“Hmmm...”

I thought that I should buy better sneakers. My legs hurt. Maybe I even have some bloody blisters. I really should spend money on a watch and shoes. No no, what am I thinking, after all I plan to quit. I wonder if even once in Tokyo while purchasing shoes I cared about anything else beside their price?

“Go to invite the night – I think that they are very poetic, wonderful words.”

Djibril’s words upset me, but I involuntarily laughed. Omar is good, this child is good. Amongst good people it’s easy to lie.

“Thanks, but for now our priority is survival, okay?” – I said falsely.

Gathered team C of children and Djibril nodded. Heading in the direction of the night I ordered them to run.

I myself also started to move.

Djinn’s dwelling

I ran, swearing profusely at my lack of exercise.

I breathe heavily and think that tomorrow I will probably be sore. In contrast to me, the children held up good, and they even had with them rifles weighing more than 5 kg. They

looked at me and were laughing. I also laughed a bit.

Though I'm not Omar, I thought that this probably means that they can't become captives. Omar's squad didn't show itself yet. He takes custody over three times the amount of people, so I guessed, that managing them takes some time.

Giving out instructions to Djibril, who tries to call through the radio I stared at the completely dark djinn's dwelling.

The place they guided me to looked like ancient or medieval ruins. A group of buildings looked much bigger than presently found in the village. They were more well-built from stone than them, but a part of them were collapsed, maybe serving as a building material for the buildings in the village. I noticed an overturned cross, so I'm guessing that here was a Christian church.

In any case there are many old buildings here, and though they look solid, it can't be told when they will collapse. I thought that I understand why the patriarch forbid the children from entering here.

I saw that the children from team C gathered and had restless expressions. Especially Djibril seemed to look at me.

"Try to not go too far inside. How is Omar?"

"It seems that, they will be here soon."

Djibril is shaking, so I smile. Of course pretending. Actually I am afraid too.

"Are you afraid of the djinn?"

"It's an old superstition. I have God beside me."

"Yes."

I exhale vapor. While we both mindlessly stared into exhaled by us vapor, I saw rushing here Omar's group.

Instead of a greeting, he quickly checks the number of people,

after what he approaches me. There is no light. Light can serve as a target. Everything takes place in the dark.

“How are you?”

“Everything’s alright.”

Hearing that on Omar’s face appeared a slight smile. He looks at the ruins and says to me:

“That you remembered from the map even such a place.”

“Because I looked at it many times.”

In my opinion, half of the OO’s work is reading maps. It is enough for me to hear a map code, and I easily remembered and imagined it. That reminds me when in a small designing company they told me, that I at least have good memory.

I have a feeling that this is an effect of a lack of tasks due to Lanson, who usually made me a toilet shift employee. When I remember it, we also often talked about such withdrawal battles. It seems that I refined myself thanks to many scenarios from Lanson, which I had to predict.

I smile bitterly. Maybe I already am 30, but I don’t understand anything. I’m not even young enough to be able to excuse myself with my age. Life that I led until this moment had to be a mistake.

“I wonder in what way the enemy will attack.”

I answered Omar with a bitter smile.

“I think that he won’t attack. He doesn’t know that we got rid of night-vision goggles, or about this place. If he thinks we are expecting them, then it doesn’t matter how inexperienced we are, he probably won’t attack anyway.”

“True. Like always a wonderful judgment of the situation.” – Omar nods. In this moment I remembered about the real OO.

“Right, Sophia. Could you inform the OO, that we retreated

to this place?”

“I’m informing in real-time. Also about your plans.”

“And what did she say about it?”

“She asks why at the bottom of the valley night falls quickly.”

We laughed loudly. Her lack of imagination was really dyed-in-the-wool.

“Alright, so we wait for a rescue squad?”

“Ok”

I see how Omar orders a longer break.

It seems that dinner will be a bit late.

Large scale transport

Leaving aside the situation in which I found myself, from today a large-scale transport operation conducted by American army was starting.

Until this moment I didn’t see that many columns of vehicles, transport consisting of trucks and armored vehicles. I wanted to see that, but after Lanson ordered me to rest, I ate a meal with Omar and threw myself on the bed. I didn’t even dream about anything.

Next day I was so sore, that I couldn’t even walk normally. Beside buying new shoes, ultimately I thought only about giving my all on my training.

My wobbly gait must have looked very funny, because Sophia’s eyes lighted up and she started to walk next to me. It seems that today she has a day off.

“You walk funny Arata.”

“Great, I am aware of that.”

Amused, Sophia placed her hand on her mouth and laughed not making any sounds. I thought that she is from another fairytale, because I don't have other words for that. According to Omar this elf girl is a typical liberal from a democratic party.

“Good that the enemy turned out to be stupid. Normally they would have shot you like sitting ducks.”- says Sophia walking next to me down the corridor and pretending as if she was holding a rifle. In Japan a gun barrel is imitated with the index finger, but in America the same finger is responsible for imitating pulling the trigger. Realizing that small difference I decided to accompany Sophia today.

In any case I feel bad about it, that I gave orders to ignore all Sophia's orders. Though I don't know how much of that is reaching her. Maybe nothing.

“Really good that the opponent turned out to be stupid.” – said Sophia one time standing in front of me, and another walking behind me. She is watching me and is laughing.

I wonder if she doesn't hold a grudge and isn't saying that sarcastically, but no. Fact, that the enemy was stupid was undeniable. When I looked at her, she stopped in front of me with a half crying face, looking at the miserable me.

“But it's really good that nothing happened to you.”

Covering my mouth with my hand I look at Sophia's teary eyes and contemplate my cruel character. I thought that I should train not only my body. In other words I'm lacking everything.

“When instead of defending the squad started running, I thought that you wouldn't make it and would stay behind.”

After those words I understood why she recommended a defensive. There is no doubt, that she recommended defense, because she thought I wouldn't manage to run away. That was probably the reason. Completely not taking soldiers into

account, children, or rather because of the lack of imagination, the only plan she was capable of thinking of had only one factor in regard – me.

I was ashamed, that I so proudly recommended my plan. Looking at my present state, Sophia's decision seems more appropriate. And who said I am outstanding?

With a hunched back I looked at Sophia. She smiles kindly.

“Thanks Sophie.”

“Hmm?” She smiled pleasantly

“You called me Sophie.”

“You prefer Sophia?”

“No, that works” – she said and we entered the mess-hall.

We will be eating together. Only, today I will have to watch out for things other than food.

Evil djinn

Due to excrements the toilet in this camp is in another building. So it was a makeshift toilet, that's why I always thought that it would be nice if they built something better.

Daily amount of waste, which isn't small, is sprinkled with medicine and finally buried on the spot. Once in a while the smell reaches even up to the office and then not only Sophia, but even Lanson frowns.

So with a wobbly step I head in the direction of this toilet. Some soldier approaches quickly. Short, with a headgear. I guess that it's Djibril.

Indeed it was Djibril. Pupils which I saw through the slit in the headgear were very large. Looking very serious like never before. With seriousness they resemble the patriarch or the

father on the rock.

Lips under the head wrap are moving.

“Be careful Arata.”

“Something happened?” – on this question Djibril looked from side to side, stretched, and whispered in my ear:

“The person you were with is an incarnation of an evil djinn.”

“You mean Sophie?”

“Yes. Probably.” – she said with seriousness, like never before. I accepted her words, thinking that rather than evil djinn it’s simply a liberal elf.

Stretching her ears above the head wrap she says:

“She has pointy ears.”

On this cute sentence I smiled bitterly.

“Okay. I will tell her to be very careful.” – I answered.

Progress of the battle and transport

Next day I couldn’t move my legs.

When I returned to work, Lanson scolded me to nevertheless work on my condition. After I answered that I understand, holding a resignation letter in my pocket, I sat down. I had to consider seriously when will be an appropriate time, so as to not create a problem in the workplace. That I had terrible difficulties writing it in English is my secret.

As always sitting on a pipe-chair I was serving as a toilet shift employee. Or maybe I was here as an adjutant, but I don’t know how much truth is in what Omar is saying.

In any case it was silent in the office. After I finished staring at a decorative plant, I looked around the whole office.

Such offices are actually also in Japan. In part it looked like a normal office. Manager and his 11 subordinates. Usually two had a day off. That's why in total the number of subordinates is 13.

On a handheld screen of a tablet I check how it goes with the transport and its defense. The plan of the main and the most important project of our company is a transport of a not small number of America's army materials conducted in this region. I thought that since during the transport on the front there is so much troops, then I am responsible for a military operation on a scale larger than I was told.

Southern Iraq? Northern Russia? Or maybe they are feigning going to Iran and in fact they are going to Afghanistan? Suddenly Lanson talks to me:

"You are probably thinking, that enemy prepared a trap."

"Yes." – I answered. I'm treating this as a next educational course from Lanson. Though I still want to quit, I go along with Lanson. I understand his expectations and kindness.

Looking satisfied from my swift reply, Lanson changed his position on the chair.

"Why?"

"It seems to me that it's better to cut off supply lines, rather than fight directly with American army."

"Yes, exactly. The question is, when it will happen." – wonders Lanson.

I wonder about my own problems. If I am to submit a resignation then probably after the whole operation. The problem is, when will that be.

"I saw how the enemy already wanted to grab captives a few times."

“I know. The day before yesterday you also came to that conclusion.”

“Yes, though they probably weren’t the same...”

Lanson smiles.

“What do you think they want captives for?”

“For money? Intelligence? For political negotiations? I think it’s something from that.”

“Which one?”

“Probably intelligence.”

It seemed that it wasn’t a bad answer. Lanson smiled.

“True. The enemy probably before us came to the conclusion, that in the American army there will be some large maneuvers.”

Lanson is thinking. It seemed that he came up with something. He aimlessly stares at the monitor at subsequent rows of the train^[5]. I also looked at the handheld monitor.

“And the transport operation truly started. They moved. I wonder what the enemy will do now.”

I wonder. First day of the transport is enormous. Over 1000 4-ton trucks. Thinking about tactical unit C, which will be en route for the whole day with more or less 2-ton material, I was able to imagine the scale of the operation. During such transport you can immediately see what’s going on. I speak.

“Information gathering ended. I think... I think, that they will attack now. They will probably want to interrupt the transport.”

Lanson smiles.

“Situation is clear. I wonder when they will attack.”

I looked at Lanson.

“I think when they are ready. Lanson. As soon as possible.”

“Probably. Since they have a small squad then from the start, from the military point of view, they didn’t have a choice. It’s better to mess it up already at the start.” – after he said that, he smiled and got up from his seat.

“Not a bad judgment. I think you will become a manager.”

Answering in my mind that I have no such intention, I look at Lanson. After he got up from the chair he started walking. I followed him with my sight.

“Where are you going?”

“The enemy will attack when he will be ready, right? For now I’m going to get some sleep. The rest I leave to you. Arata, you are a temporary manager.” He waved his hand and left.

After I escorted him with my gaze, I crossed my arms while sitting on a pipe chair.

He probably didn’t sense that I want to quit.

Again in the village

We were wrong.

3 days pass, 4 days pass, and nothing is happening. Transport gradually moves forward. There wasn’t even a single accident like vehicle overturning into the valley. For now our work was managing the route, so on one lane there won’t be any jams.

It can be said that it’s easy and pleasant. It would be nice if until my resignation that won’t change. Soon 10 days will pass anyway. It’s 24th on the calendar. Delivery probably went according to the plan, at least according to what I know American army started acting at last.

Regarding me, until present day, I seriously took up gym in

my spare time. Days passed me on work and exercises. Additionally lately for some reason, being in a bad mood Sophia reproached me about being macho. On another hand Djibril says that it's good for my health.

Angel, elf, and now ruins... here really is some sort of fantasy – I came across this kind of nonsensical thought. So nonsensical that I didn't touch this subject.

Tomorrow will be 25th. Festival day, to which invited me the patriarch

When I informed Lanson about it, he instantly gave permission. Except that due to the lack of hands to help, there won't be an escorting squad. I understood that.

To the village I was supposed to go with Omar, Djibril and the kids from team C. At night, with night-vision goggles. To date there were no night attacks, that's why we are going at night.

For the first time I had night-vision goggles on me. Pretty light. Aside from the stupid look as if my eyes popped out, it was bearable. It wasn't infrared, it only amplified the light of stars and moon, so you could see better. That's why it is also called starlight goggle. By the way I have a feeling that I already saw this explanation in some manga.

Omar told me to not look through night-vision goggles at the bright camp. I turned around and looked at him with a naked eye. If you look at such a bright light through night-vision goggles, then supposedly circuit breaker cuts off the power.

If you think about it today is an eve of the new moon. The moon is so small.

I turn away from the camp and hit the road.

Walking, I ask Djibril if she isn't sleepy. Satisfied hearing her quiet voice of criticism, that she isn't a child and everything is alright, I went ahead.

Before I noticed, I had a friend in Omar. Also a small friend in the form of Djibril. When I think about it, that's the first time when I managed to build a decent relationship with someone in this business. In the case of Sophia... it wasn't such a relationship. She was twisted, weird for both sides.

I wonder about that. It was me that reluctantly associating with her, had a feeling of superiority over Sophie. I think about, who the heck am I, that I look down on her like that. Poor Sophie.

Wait, It's this term that is looking down on her. She is strong. Maybe I don't know that, because I didn't notice. In some ways she is much stronger than me. Feeling sorry for her must be probably inappropriate coming from me.

I thought, that probably she managed to get a friend for the first time. I would want to look her in the eyes without feeling superior and feeling sorry. Not only her, but in relation to everyone. That's why I have to someday repair my relationship with Sophie.

In any case I wonder how my classmates from my school times and coworkers from the small designer company would react, if they heard that I have a big and brave black guy in the military for a friend.

I laughed a bit thinking about it.

New moon festival

With a calm pace we reached the village when the sun rose. We said our greetings, I gave to the patriarch and Djibril's father 48 Budweisers and received a room, to which I was guided.

I slept like dead almost until the evening. Too bad, it was a festival after all, but lately I can feel my age catching up to me. I

have to train.

Experience and prudence of a young man, but the body is falling apart. Simply a tragedy.

I am woken up by shining through the window yellow sunrays. I straighten my tie, put on my suit and pull up my collar. As there wasn't any mirror I couldn't check clearly, but probably everything was normal. I go outside. Sunrays fall directly on me and I can't see anything. I go under the shadow of a building and look around the village.

A normal peaceful day. Laughing children are helping with work in the fields. Only no festival could be seen.

Damn, I missed it. I was surprised by that, because I just realized that I looked forward to it. If you think about it, then for the first time since I'm working I had in my plans something resembling sightseeing – I thought with regret. Though I slept very well. Appropriate exercises and adequate amount of sleep probably make a person happy. Anyway it's a shame.

When I shrugged my shoulders from disappointment, Omar stood next to me. Facing the building with his back he crossed his arms.

“You look somewhat disappointed.”

“You will probably say it's childish but I was looking forward to this festival.”

“You are looking forward somewhat regretful.” – said surprised Omar.

While I was wondering about the meaning of those words, Omar is stretching.

“It will start soon.”

“What?”

“It’s a new moon festival after all, so it’s obvious that it takes place at night.”

I hadn’t thought about that. In any case I was glad. Unexpected delight.

Omar made a sullen face and said that the way in which Japanese enjoy something is complicated.

And that’s how evening came. I was cheerful, but the whole village was in such mood. You could feel the excitement in the air. Everywhere there are cressets burning, with guarding them people. If the fire spreads it would be a catastrophe, that’s why under every one of them there are meticulously placed buckets with water.

Flames of the huge bonfire are strong. It’s enough if you get your face closer for it to be covered in soot, that’s why Djibril’s father said not to get close. Exactly as if he rebuked an unruly child, which embarrassed me a bit.

The festival starts. Under the moonless night, but under the starry sky, on the ground many cressets are burning.

Though there isn’t any cheerful music, cheerful people are starting to pounce food at once. Festival is a festival.

I look around. Though without music, there is a rhythm. Rhythm is created by poem recitation^[6]. I don’t understand anything from it, but someone was reciting and I decided to treat it as music.

It was a simple village, but now everything is colorful. Especially villager’s clothes. Everyone had on them colorful costumes with detailed patterns.

Seeing that I’m enjoying myself, Djibril’s father weakened his penetrating gaze and looked at me. He is laughing.

He is offering me a drink from goat milk mixed with blood. I’m immediately energized. There rather wasn’t any alcohol in

that, but maybe because of the blood, my cheeks got hot. I drank without frowning probably only because it was dark and I didn't see what was inside the vessel.

"You are really a straightforward man." – says amused Djibril's father.

Not waiting for my response, he brought a beautiful young girl. On her head and shoulders she had beautiful lace. Clearly a beautiful girl.

"That's Djibril."

"Errr?"

My surprise caused the indignation of the beautiful girl – Djibril, and loud laughter of her father.

At Djibril's words that I allowed myself to be deceived by the evil djinn too much, the father was still laughing, and I looking at both of them didn't know what is happening.

It's being said that women are fickle, though that's only an excuse.

"Ah, well I was surprised by such a different appearance. You look very pretty."

Knowing that I'm only trying to somehow get out of this situation however, I still said that as part of an excuse.

Djibril's father laughed without rest. The girl turned her back to me.

The festival is starting to get lively.

In this moment Sophia is working, but I wonder what she would say seeing this party – I thought looking at people, whose movement resembled swaying movement of bonfire flames. And it's curious what about Shawii. Maybe it would be good to make a stop at that country and visit that brothel when I finish working here.



I thought that I would give her about one dress and return to Japan.

“Nice if there would be a dance.” – I said

Djibril’s father was writhing with laughter.

I said to Djibril that it’s probably enough. She looked at me, lowering her sight for some reason, and said that dancing takes place inside.

I nodded as a sign that I understand. Djibril’s father is still laughing. For some reason he has terrible fun.

“Arata, won’t you take my daughter for a wife?”

At those unexpected words I widely opened my eyes. Suddenly it occurs to me. Ah yes, he is joking. If it’s a joke then I want to retort, but sadly I’m lacking ability in English.

“I’m too old. Too big age difference.” – I said with seriousness.

I don’t have the courage to glance at Djibril. Especially since honestly speaking I didn’t really have any attachment to real girls. Well even if I had, it still wasn’t an option. For many reasons.

“Why? If the girl is young then children will be healthy. Don’t worry,” – says Djibril’s father.

I wasn’t very amused. Shiver ran up my back. For some reason other than goat blood my face is getting red. I have a feeling that if I look at Djibril that will be the end.

I tried to look at other things and saw a running Omar.

“What is it Omar?”

“We got done in. The camp is being attacked.”

I wanted to retort if it wasn’t maybe a joke, but I know his character well.

I nodded with my eyes in the direction of Djibril's father, that everything will be alright with his daughter.

I said for them to enjoy their festival and in a hurry went with Omar to a secluded place.

In the festival's shadow

We moved away from the festival and cressets. We stood still and me and Omar very seriously talked to each other. Actually there aren't many more serious conversations than this one.

"How many of them are there?"

"I don't know. It started 20 minutes ago. Arata, what do you think about it?"

I wonder while the night wind is blowing at me. After moving away from cressets it immediately becomes cold. Luckily it doesn't affect my thinking, so there wasn't a problem.

"It's not an ordinary provocation. I think that it's a serious offensive. There are many of them, like never before. It seems that they carefully prepared the whole operation."

Omar exhaled. He looked surprised, but all in all I don't really know.

"You say that as if you saw that. You saved me earlier so I believe you, but from where you got such conclusions?"

"Until now the enemy didn't attack at night. He had to gather intelligence, so that he had enough of it to break this habit."

Don't look in the direction of the camp – I remembered Omar's warning when I put on night-vision goggles while moving away from the camp. Even at night it's bright in the camp. Their OO conducts the operation after gathering detailed intelligence. To the point that the danger is serious. I speak:

“We also don’t have any idiots. If we have someone at the front row then they immediately take some preventive actions. That’s why from the enemy perspective a surprise attack can succeed only once. Hence why for the first time he gathered forces as big as possible. Probably because he had to focus most of his forces on this attack he took so much time and attacked just now.”

I imagine the enemy. They had to have problems making a plan for such a large number of people. Until now setting aside the general framework, in his movement patterns dispersion could be seen. Both equipment and enemy numbers were dispersed. There is no doubt that this time we are dealing with multiple strongly independent groups

Though since it takes a lot of time, the offensive came late, effect of which is a large surprise attack on the camp. In terms of stopping the American army, strategically the timing of this attack is unsuccessful. Though in tactical terms they managed to fool us. Speaking directly, a futile effort. In the camp there are people I know though, so I can’t really be calm.

I nervously bit my lips thinking about Sophia and Lanson. I barely managed to imagine, that something could happen to Sophie and I was shocked stiff.

Omar is looking at the side of my face. Serious face.

“Do you think that our company has a chance to win?” – asks me Omar.

I frowned.

“I don’t know. Attack on the camp was unexpected, but the reason for that was the gathering of forces for frequent patrols. Taking the camp won’t be easy.”

The problem is, that the enemy took action while knowing about that. That’s why I said that at this point nothing could be told.

I think about Sophia.

If only nothing would happen to you.

“What are you planning to do now Arata?” – after those words from Omar I return to myself. Thinking too much about Sophia, the situation won’t improve. I’m thinking about my position in all this.

“I would want to return, but we wouldn’t make it anyway. In terms of war potential it doesn’t make any sense.”

“I also think that. Though I have precious to me subordinates there.”

“I also have friends.”

“What would you have done as an OO?”

At those words from Omar I recalled the image of a blue button. I thought that this is the second time I am pressing it not as an order, but of my own will. Present situation was also my mistake, that I didn’t predict such stupidity from the enemy. I would want to be able to do something about it.

I raised my head. A worried girl in a folk costume looks at us while hiding under the wall.

“What happened Djibril?”

“Eee... should I change?”

“It’s alright, it’s alright. Entertain your father.” – I replied.

Hiding her face even more, she said:

“Entertaining Arata is more important. Father also believes so.”

“Alright, but we are not going back now. If so, then tomorrow. I will explain everything to fathers later.”

After thinking she says:

“And you won’t go back to the camp without telling

anything?”

“Of course not. We will come back soon, wait.” – after answering her I looked at Omar.

“What would I do as an OO? There is only one thing I would do if I was an OO now.” – I said.

“Will you lend me your short-wave radio?”

Attack and escape

Speaking about a battlefield. It's troublesome how to speak about a place, which probably couldn't fit this description more.

I think for about a minute before I will use the short-wave radio.

In the end I decided to limit myself to the bare minimum.

“Arata here. I can conduct an operation at any moment. Just say the word.”

Sounds of the firefight in the distance. Other than a popgun. Strong sounds. Probably rapid fire – I think.

“Arata? Is it safe there?”

It was Lanson. I calmed down a bit. There is still a chance to do something.

“I apologize, that at such point in time I'm not in the camp. It's calm here.”

“Ah yes?” – he said with a surprise, after what he quickly explains the situation:

“Around half the camp is occupied. They holed up in every building and are now firing. They are throwing grenades like mad.”

Assuming that grenades are much more effective than rifles, I replied. There exist a danger that through the window a grenade will fall in.

“Not a good situation, huh?”

“You also understate it.”

After a while of silence Lanson speaks to me:

“What would you do as an OO?”

“Immediately retreat.” – I answered immediately.

I don’t know how the situation looks in the other camp, but it doesn’t seem that reinforcement will come anytime soon.

Lanson sighs.

“This office will be blown up. Possibility of control will be lost.”

“Resistance also won’t do anything. The end will be the same. Additionally there will be casualties.”

“It seems that some of ours already ran away. I don’t know how many forces I can unite.”

“In the end they are people working for money. Though in Japan we call it a blessing in disguise.”

“I don’t understand Japanese, it’s too weird.” – I smile bitterly at those words from Lanson.

It will be alright. It will go well.

“You can still see markers of every soldier, right? If you can see the movement of the deserters you will know the correct escape route. They managed to get away, so the route they are following must be good. Follow them.”

Lanson’s laugh can be heard.

“Arata, you are more outstanding than I thought. You have an excellent military sense.”

“That’s irrelevant now. Sophie. Sophie, can you hear me? You aren’t shaking somewhere in the corner of a room, are you? Get up. You have to run.”

A sound of getting up can be heard. The emitted sound is getting closer. It takes the microphone.

“Don’t make fun of me. I’m not shaking at all. Though I was wondering whether to commit suicide.”

“It doesn’t suit you. When I come back to Japan I will send you anime you told me you want to watch , so come on!”

“Idiot.”

Sophie’s crying is assaulting my earlobe. I thought that I don’t want this sound to remain in my ears if she died. At any cost I must help her.

With a shaking voice she said quietly:

“Can we go together to Japan?”

“I can guide you around Akihabara.” – I answered.

Silence fell. In the distance shots can be heard. I saw that Omar is looking at heavens, but I didn’t have the time to think about it.

“I will survive somehow and slap you.” – I heard Sophie’s declaration.

I couldn’t even guess why would she want to slap me, but for now I decided to set aside this problem. For today, on a really far side.

“Oh well, okay. Good luck.” – after I replied, I recalled in my head the map of the camp and the area.

Lately I’m only running and withdrawing.

Djibril’s father

I had the intention to give orders until the battery in my short-wave radio runs out, but I wasn't given a chance for that much. In the end Djibril's father and the patriarch came. And even subordinates with guns, I gave the short-wave radio to Omar and went to them.

"I apologize, that I didn't show myself at the festival. The camp is being attacked." – when I said that, the patriarch said that he knows.

It seems that Djibril managed to explain the situation.

"That's why we are now contacting them."

"I heard that around a hundred of them recovered their weapons and started to withdraw. Capable leadership, even exceptional."

"Ee, why do you know that?"

Djibril's father points a weapon in my direction.

I knew that I'm stupid, but that's probably why I didn't understand what pointing a gun in my direction means. And because I didn't know what it means, I also didn't feel danger. Such were my feelings.

Patriarch similarly to Djibril opened his eyes with admiration and explained slowly.

"What bravery. When I heard about the exceptional command, I remembered the hero about whom I heard from my grandchild. A hero who even if he is somewhere far, commands exactly as if he was in the same place. His name means dawn."

"Despite, that he was in another place." – Djibril's father said, as if he was continuing the patriarch's tale.

Even an idiot like my finally understood what it was about. Also Lanson's surprise became clear.

So this village was also an accomplice in attacks against us. I understand, Though I didn't understand anything more. Luckily I already gave most of the orders.

I thought it would be stupid to raise my hands now in a gesture of surrender so I waited calmly. I have a feeling that it's once again stupidity.

"Why do I know? Because it was me that said not to attack you."

"And it isn't about Djibril?"

"She also isn't a child from here."

After Djibril's father saw my frown he smiled broadly.

"Well that's how it looks. This village also hates America. Arata. I would want to treat you not as a captive but as a guest. Cooperate with us."

"What about Omar?" – I asked. He is an American.

Djibril's father nodded satisfied. As if he was saying I passed.

"If he will be good, we will treat him the same."

I hesitated whether to raise my hands or not.

"I understand."

In the end I didn't raise them.

^ 1. That is *moeshinu* and *hazukashinu* which means something along the lines of moe/embarrassing enough to die.

^ 2. Like earlier bold text usually means things in English (or Engrish if you prefer), but since in this case he uses the English word a lot, the editor (that is me) decided to keep in bold only relevant uses in the story (like when he is explaining the English word)

^ 3. EN:That's more or less what it means, maybe some idiom,

but I have no idea. So don't look at me. Well basically he helped him and let's leave it at that

- ^ 4. *yabai* means something like terrific, amazing, cool, dangerous, or risky. You know you already heard it in anime somewhere.

- ^ 5. Apparently train can also be used in regard to military supply lines.

- ^ 6. *shigin* in the original. It's doubtful they recited Chinese or Japanese poems though.

Chapter 5

Life of a captive

Nile River

Next day and the one after that, there was an aerial bombing. Though I couldn't see it, just heard the sound of flying airplanes. I was indoors, so saying specifically it was a house arrest.

Luckily there isn't a single direct hit on the village. Djibril says that at this point in the season, wind blows away the bombs outside the valley and they fall on the west side. Just in case of unexploded bombs that area is off-limits. Because this village is at the bottom of a valley, I guessed it must be hard to drop bombs. On the opposite beyond this village it had to be tough.

Current military retribution has ended with this. From professional curiosity I was interested in where they had dropped the bombs, but it ended at just that.

And then another 10 days passed.

House arrest loosened and I could move quite freely within the village.

As my overseer Djibril is following me , but even with a headgear she is a cute girl, so it's a pleasure.

I was fully motivated to leave the company, so honestly speaking I had no complaints with this treatment. I think the position I found myself in is the same as that of a noble, one where you don't have to hurt people^[1]. It's a very lucky position and I am happy with it. Comparing this feeling to 6 000 000 yens of annual income. It's cheap – I thought. That

job wasn't worth it.

I also thought about what I am going to do, after I go back to Japan. Well, probably looking for a job is the first thing, but after that?

I feel sorry for Sophie and Lanson, but I think there is an extremely high probability that they have successfully escaped. Directions and route weren't bad.

It was just a coincidence, but I didn't evacuate them to this village, instead I guided them to the nearest camp. Originally I planned to think up something, so that this village won't become a target, but unexpectedly it was exactly what happened.

And here I am, fairly satisfied in the village.

Village at the bottom of the valley is in fact built symmetrically. The true meaning of the bottom of the valley are symmetrically built buildings on the wasteland, where pebbles and rocks are scattered. Originally buildings were only at one side, but after USSR's collapse, population began to grow and it expanded.

The reason they don't build at the bottom of the valley is probably because originally there was a river here, but maybe there is also another reason.

Going up and down the fields similar to terraced rice-fields, I am looking at wheat. Touching grain ears is a nice feeling.

Eating conditions are good, there is also freedom to some extent, so I am going to exercise every day.

Patrolling terraced rice-fields is one of such exercises. When I reach the highest place I'm out of breath, so that made it a good training. It's only a habit left from the job, but I considered it a good thing. Good things for health are good.

Djibril runs after me when I climb. I don't know how useful

she was as a guardian, but she had enthusiasm – that's for sure. I thought that she started to grow her hair a little, but because of the headgear I couldn't find out.

She is looking down at the village, like me.

“You like it here, don't you?” – she started to talk.

“I do.”

“Because it resembles Japan?”

“That too a bit.”

I smiled. I couldn't say that I've actually never been to terraced rice-fields. That's why I said something which had nothing to do with it.

“They say fools and smoke love heights.”

“I think Arata is not a smoke.”

“Well, that stupid one.” – when I said that, for some reason Djibril scowled.

“That never crossed my mind.” – she says.

I unintentionally smiled. I know well she doesn't make a fool of me. But I feel she overestimates me. Because of that she must have ignored the stupid one from the beginning.

When I laugh, I notice Djibril casting down her eyes, but I didn't say anything.

“Every year when the river appears those fields are washed away with earth and sand. Terrific view.” – said Djibril, while watching the village. It is a sight she was seeing from a very young age.

“Setting aside the arrangement of stones, it must be hard to cultivate again.” – when I said that, Djibril smiled behind headgear.

“But patriarch says that thanks to that we can cultivate every

year.”

“Wheat can be hindered by repeated cultivation, right? Like a Nile, huh?”

I remembered history lessons. Who would think that high school knowledge will come in handy.

“So Arata knows about the Nile river? I heard about it from the legends.” – Djibril is surprised.

Confused I denied it.

“I also know it from stories. I learned about it in school. Right, Herodotus said that Egypt is Nile’s gift. Thanks to Nile’s flooding they can harvest a lot of wheat. Now I see. Here is the same as Nile.” – I said and smiled.

It washes away soil damaged by repeated cultivation. It must be indeed a terrific sight.

Well, I don’t know when I can return home, so perhaps I will be able to see it.

Settlement of rent

I noticed it on the 10th day since I was a prisoner.

I failed to pay the rent for this month. It’s about that room in Tokyo.

Damn – I thought. At the same time I also thought, that maybe they will forgive me for just one month of default. But still I wasn’t thinking about maintaining this room anymore.

For a moment I unexpectedly cut my connection with figurines, anime and LN’s. Well, whatever – I thought.

Nowadays Djibril is trotting behind my back. And I also have my friend, Omar.

It’s a small world, but well... that’s not bad – I’ve been thinking

recently. Still I'm living without dreams or perspectives, but I've got new important things.

What about ideas to reverse this situation? I am thinking about that while walking, so that Djibril can keep up.

I don't have any dreams or hopes. It's ok. It means I was that kind of man.

Moreover what about helping out with Djibril's and Omar's dreams and hopes?

If I can face them without a sense of superiority or pity, maybe it's possible. No, it is possible. I thought I can do something good.

“What happened Arata?”

“I thought that I want to see you growing up.”

Suddenly Djibril staggered. After that she pulled her slipping off headgear with both hands and said: “I am already grown up enough”.

I laugh. She's saying that, but she's still a child.

I didn't want to admit it until now, but I have a military talent. The company and the village keep saying that to me.

Still I doubt the existence of this talent, but I thought I don't need to hesitate to use the fact that everyone is saying I have it. I am going to use it as much as I can. I can surely use it to feel good, until I flashily lose once.

Now I only have to wait for an opportunity.

Though I am sure there isn't much to wait for.

Living as a prisoner

Life as a prisoner continues. It's already half a month since that day.

I know the flow of time more or less from observing the moon. Counting time using moon is a great thing, in the past it was probably even more important – I thought. From the perspective of an amateur like me, changes of the moon were easier to see than sun's.

Although I was a prisoner I was enjoying it. Unlike me, Omar looked quite worn out by those 2 weeks.

“You’re looking tired. Are you okay?”

When I asked Omar about it while washing my face in the morning he made a bitter smile.

“I admire your shamelessness.”

“Worrying doesn’t change anything. Everyone successfully escaped, you know.” – I consoled Omar.

After he washed his face he looks at me while wiping with a towel. I thought those eyes look like eyes of a good man.

“What do you think will happen from now on? I want to hear your opinion as an OO.”

After his words I have a horribly uncomfortable feeling. Come to think of it I was after all an OO. Though it was a short period of time, not even a year. I thought that it must be a burnout syndrome.

Omar is looking at me with a serious face. He is a precious friend. That’s why I regained some motivation.

“OO’s aren’t prophets.” – I said as a preface and continued.

“Strictly speaking we aren’t soldiers. We are beyond the frame of major international treaties.”

“American army won’t look for us, will they? It also doesn’t seem that the company will make a move.”

“Right.”

“Situation seems hopeless.”

Is it really true? – I wondered. Personally I don’t have any background in military service, so maybe because of that I can’t feel American’s army worth in looking for us. From the beginning I didn’t have any expectations from the company.

I am thinking about what he said.

“Simply put, only because American’s army or the company won’t help us it doesn’t mean it’s hopeless.”

Omar is earnestly listening to my words. He is washing his face for the second time. We were usually separated. Washing our faces was one of the few occasions when we could see each other.

“So it means there is ‘another’ possibility?” – he says.

I nod. I also wash my face for the second time. Water is cold.

“Of course. Putting aside your American nationality, I don’t have a value as a prisoner. And they know it too.” – I said.

“Right, if they were to kill you, they would do it earlier. Honestly speaking I think they’re still wondering what to do with us. What do you think they’ll do in the end?”

“Make us do manual labor? Release parasites? Hand over somewhere? Finally there aren’t any other options.” – when I say that, Omar dressed himself.

“I don’t like the perspective of being handed over to some guys who’re holding a grudge against Americans.”

“I think usually it’s manual labor.” – I said it, considering the most sensible scenario.

Patriarch and Djibril’s father took a risk to some extent, so if they were going to hand us over, they should have done it in the beginning. After obtaining prisoners from the camp raid that would surely be enough. – after I said that, I went for

breakfast.

But I think they won't make us wait for so long – I added.

Boatman on the rock

Omar is worn out more than I expected.

I was sunbathing leaning on the rock near to the patriarch's house and worrying about the negative things he is saying. Recently I got into sunbathing. Thereupon Djibril's father came and sat on the rock.

Which reminds me that previously the composition was the same.

Djibril's father probably did it on purpose. He looks at me and smiled with satisfaction.

“So what, would you like to take my daughter now?”

It was the first thing he said. While wondering why he is saying things like that, I sought a rebuttal.

“I think Djibril is a very good daughter. Leaving that aside, why me? I don't understand.”

“She is a child who was once handed over to your guys and Americans. She is corrupted. She can't marry a man from the village.”

When I frown Djibril's father smiled.

“Yeah, that face. You were also frowning before, when father, the patriarch spoke.”

“That's obvious.”

“Yeah, obvious. You say obvious things as they are. You're decent. That's why. Patriarch, Americans and probably me as well. We're aiming for different things.”

There is a person who thinks similar to me. Surprised I was looking at Djibril's father face.

He looks back at me.

"You think patriarch and your company are decent?"

"No."

"Right. If I'm giving away a daughter I want it to be at least a bit decent guy."

I was angry, thinking that result of that thinking was someone like me. I felt very sorry for Djibril. I was looking at her father and talked back.

"Omar is honest and pure. It's because of politics that he hired soldiers from this village. I think the company wanted to avoid trouble, so they wanted to tie friendly connections with nearest – this village. And accordingly with children..."

Something bitter was thrust deeply into my mouth when I just thought about words like "rape", so I frowned.

Djibril's father slightly nods.

"I know. If that were the case that would be nice. But the one who got hurt is my daughter. Disobeying teachings is like suicide. Whatever I say, whatever you say, Djibril can't have ties with this village's men. That's why."

After he said that he looked at me and said.

"That's why it's you. If it's you she would still accept it."

That was what parent's true intentions were. I was struck by that and couldn't move. I couldn't completely understand not only Djibril's thoughts, but women as a whole, but I understand well Djibril's father – that's what struck me.

"Please let me think." – when I said that, Djibril's father cast down his eyes like he was bearing the pain.

“Please hurry. There’s not much time left.”

Thinking and strolling

I wonder what does it mean, that there’s not much time left.

I was strolling while thinking about it.

During this half of a day my confidence got worn out more than Omar’s.

I can’t gather my thoughts.

Even if I ignore the matter of the wedding, nothing but bad aftertaste is left. A bitter one.

So far I’ve been unconsciously doing bad things. Now, even if it’s not only my fault, because of this a girl I know is in a horrible situation. Even if it’s for a moment I wonder about a man’s position, in which he’s getting money and hurting others. I wanted to do something for my conscience. From the bottom of my heart.

I thought it’s impossible that there is no other scenario, in which Djibril could become happy by her own will.

If that was the OO’s work, I think I could do something, but unfortunately it’s a different story than military affairs. When I think about it, it’s a good thing that things which military can do are limited.

I realized it and took a breath. It’s a known story that politics is above military.

Suddenly I thought about what would Sophie say. Would she laugh? Or make a frowning expression? Well, usually if it’s her she would grumble. It’s strange, but she would say such things for sure. Her manner of ignoring reality is indeed irritating, but as an idealism it’s not wrong, I think.

I feel that Sophie is a much more praiseworthy person sticking till the end in her idealism, than me that is maneuvering as I see fit between reality and idealism.

There is something disturbing in thinking that far – I thought.

When I raised my face in fact there was something disturbing. Something behind my back pulled my suit. It was Djibril.

“What’s the matter, Djibril?”

“Beyond this point the village ends, Arata.”

“Oh, right. Sorry.”

I’ve read in novels about walking too far while thinking, but I haven’t thought that it will happen to me. I was a little embarrassed.

“Shall we go back?” – I say while correcting my suit.

Djibril shook her head and nodded. I faintly heard the rustling of the headgear.

We walk together. In the camp that view wasn’t anything special, but in this village a man and a woman walking together seems like something that doesn’t happen. That’s why Djibril walked a little behind.

I can’t calm down at all.

“What was father saying?” – calls me a voice from behind.

Walking I was thinking about how I will answer. It takes a lot of time making an English essay in my head. I am still far away from speaking automatically.

“He is concerned about you.” – I said. It’s not a lie.

“I see.” – she replied and walked in silence.

I am really perplexed as to how I should speak to her. In the first place my English is bad. Well, first of all I don’t know what to say in Japanese, so it comes before an essay.

“Please don’t worry. Even if I go far away it will be okay.”

I turned around confused. Come to think of it Djibril’s father also said that there is not much time.

“What do you mean, far away?”

“I can’t be in the village, so I will go somewhere.”

I stopped and thought about the meaning of that words. It was clear that it isn’t going somewhere of her own will.

So exile... or precisely throwing away, is that how the village thinks?

“Not only you, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

Thinking about everyone in team C made my body and expression stiff. Just taking a bride is not a solution.

I have realized that Djibril was putting hands on her mouth and running somewhere. Still standing still, I couldn’t even stop her.

Offer

They made me wait more than I thought.

That day I was thinking about Djibril and other children in the house I was given, while a messenger came in. And then together with Omar we were guided to one room, where the patriarch was waiting.

As always on a ceiling there is a glittering pet bottle. I’ve always been wondering what’s that, but I couldn’t breach this topic.

Patriarch opens his mouth:

“You’re mercenaries.”

“Company said we’re not, but that’s right.” – I replied to the patriarch.

He nods with his deeply wrinkled face and continues.

“If that’s the case what do you think about being hired by this village?”

I folded my arms. That was a bit unexpected. I was imagining that they will rope us into farm work, but that was completely different.

Patriarch looks at us with curiosity.

“What is it?”

“Well... is there a military threat?”

“American army will come. Thereunder your company probably will as well.”

Oh, now I get it. My fight just ended, but I noticed that in fact nothing has ended. Thinking that it will end just on the aerial bombing is a convenient way of thinking.

“So you’re saying to just betray them?” Omar makes a grim face.

Patriarch softened his expression a little and answered that not betray, just this time to make a contract with us. Before Omar asked what’s the difference I grabbed his arm.

“Let’s listen to the end my friend.” – I said that and Omar just said sorry to me.

On the patriarch’s face appears a smile. Presumably this person likes sincere manly friendship. It’s that macho thing. – I thought. This time for real. I can’t possibly come to like it.

“Well, actually the one who will come are the government troops. The ones, which are supporting the American army.”

“I see.”

I nodded and started to think. So my opponents would be the ones who're receiving guidance from the green berets.

I looked at the patriarch and opened my mouth. I had in mind team C and Djibril.

"I am okay with being hired, but first I want to confirm a few things."

"What things?"

Patriarch was drawn into the conversation quicker than I thought or maybe he said that in surprise. I put my doubts into words.

"You've tried to give American army a hard blow. It's ok. However before the attack I think you knew it would happen, I mean the retaliation. So where and how are you going to settle that?"

"How does it concern your employment?"

"To do my work well I must understand my employer's intentions."

That was half-true. The other half is that I need to gather intel.

Maybe it's because our positions were different, but I couldn't help thinking that from the perspective of my former enemy, that is guerrillas side – aren't we trying to fight a war we have no chance of winning?

I was thinking that now I've gained a chance to ask this question, I always wanted to ask.

Patriarch sighed, took a deep breath, breathed out, and then looked at me.

"There was a village across the mountain from here"

The elder continues:

“This village was 4 months ago attacked by your company or American army. Do you know about it?”

I thought my heart was going to jump up, but Omar spoke first.

“I hear it for the first time. Really? They attacked a village?”

The elder bitterly nods.

“If you want to see it, I will send you there. Maybe that was an example to non-cooperation, but we together with neighboring clans made up our minds. We’ll fight to the end. It’s better than being separately slaughtered. They even attacked escaping girls.”

“It’s a lie.” – I muttered before Omar. The time fits, but because of mountains the radio waves wouldn’t reach. It has to be lie, it’s impossible.

“I can even take you there tomorrow. But I answered honestly. What about you?”

Omar looked at me. I was pale. Then looked at the patriarch.

“I can’t believe it that suddenly, but let me think for a bit. If it’s true I also have an idea.”

Omar covered up for me. – I thought briefly. I noticed that together with gratitude for Omar my nausea couldn’t stop.

Is it all my fault? A grand play I’ve created and I’ve been taking role in at the same time?

I’ve been suppressing spasmodic laugh and nausea, when I saw the patriarch leaving.

“Do you know about it?”

“No, I don’t. I’ve felt sick just thinking about it.” – I lied.

I feel sick. Very sick.

“Certainly.” – says Omar with a face only a fine fellow can

have.

I stood up. I didn't even manage to say to the end that I am going to throw up. Until morning I've been throwing up many times.

To the deserted village

Next day, together with an escort – a few watching us soldiers – we walked with Omar to a place, where there was a village.

I don't remember anything from the route. Being sleepy was tough. If I weren't sleepy I would have probably gone mad.

Because of sleepiness I lost consciousness, so I was helped up many times by Omar.

“You're so bold when it comes to yourself, but you're so weak after being startled about one massacred village.” – said quietly Omar, who was now energetic instead of me.

I felt friendship from that sound.

It's not like that, Omar. – I think. You're completely wrong. I don't have a feeling that I look bold, but I feel sick because of myself.

That's what I thought, but didn't say anything. It hurts that I can't say it. I have a feeling that I am steadily turning into a miscreant.

On the other hand what am I going to do now? – I say to myself after cooling down. Didn't you keep your job and come as far as here to see it for yourself?

This is exactly it. I am here now, because I surely wished for it. To see for myself. I thought I would regret it my entire life, that's why I've been rejecting going back to Japan.

But I feel like throwing up.

I am crumbling and there is no Shawii, what should I do? Should I rather rely on Djibril?

Is it even possible? – I think. I solemnly understand that I'm the lowest kind of person. But I haven't thought even once about trying to do that.

We've reached the deserted village.

Topographic maps and sights which I was always seeing at OO's job are piling up before my eyes.

Even if I've tried to forget that map, it's not a thing I can forget so quickly.

Bullet marks on buildings are fresh. When I looked at the roof, where there was a blown away window by a grenade, I felt gloomy.

I was asked by a guard if we should walk around outside the village.

He says that there are no corpses because neighboring villages helped with the burial.

Being doubly grateful for making a burial and that I didn't have to watch the corpses, I walked around outside the village. From the south to the east side.

Wind was blowing up clouds of dust, making patterns on the ground. Trampling down on them I was walking in silence.

Ahead there is a little protruding hill. I see a road on the hill. It must be a place, from where I was easily shooting at the refugees. There was a hill and road too.

When I looked down I saw a mass graveyard on the side of the road. I was thinking that when it comes to a critical moment my sickness also stops.

I descended from the hill and sat down before graveyard.

It couldn't be helped that my tears were falling.

What have I done?

1. Felt that there should be at least one reference, and it does sound a bit stiff to me. Well the general idea is that he likes it there and he doesn't need to repeat his stunt with that village.

Chapter 6

My way of ending war

Reemployment

When I went back to the village I immediately spoke to the patriarch and decided to be hired.

It's not that I thought about it as an atonement, but I wanted to do something in order to reduce the number of victims. Omar also came with me.

I've tried to talk it over with him, saying that when I take this job he probably won't have to fight, but he refused with a smile.

"Arata, you haven't used a real gun yet, have you? Commander should be on the field."

I couldn't argue with that. I was deeply thankful to him and wanted to tell him the truth someday.

I immediately begin organizing an unit. I'm going to rebuild tactical unit S from half of the team C members. Gather child soldiers, who since the attack on the village left their professional duty and came back to this village, and form a unit which will correspond to approximately 2 tactical units S.

I will make those children useful, so that they wouldn't be abandoned or sold, including Djibril. I thought that as long as they are helpful for village defense, I wouldn't have to use them in an emergency. For the village they are like garbage for utilization so it should be easily settled.

When I told Omar about it, he looked grateful and said that if that is the case, then our fight indeed has a meaning.

Permission was granted instantly. Djibril's father supported it.

In the evening after arrangements, where I thanked for the permission to compose an unit, Djibril's father saw me off to the entryway.

"I wasn't thinking that you will use Djibril not as a wife, but as a soldier."

"It just ended that way"

I didn't know what he was thinking, when he patted me on the shoulder broadly grinning after I said it.

"Well, a hero's wife must be a hero too."

I've just smiled without saying anything. I thought that I will just let him speak.

After that I run to Omar. Now we're living together.

"Omar, we have permission."

He patted me on the shoulder broadly grinning. It seems that was an universal gesture.

"When I heard the plan it seemed like a good idea, but I wondered if it will go well with getting permission. Yet you got it. You're really great."

I smile bitterly. Sometimes Omar is praising me too much.

"It's easy. They are overrating my skills. More precisely, they think my commanding skills are high."

"I think your skills are in fact high, but what about it?"

"Of course it's best to give me command, but there will be people who won't be happy with taking instructions from a foreigner."

Omar was thinking for a while and then nodded. I also nodded and say:

"That's why they agreed to make another unit under my command."

“This is magic. Arata, you would sell a piano to a handless tribe.”

“I admit I’m a bad guy.”

“That was an old Chinese saying.”

“Thanks then.”

We laughed together without making any sound.

Anyway, for now I prevented the scattering of kids. This is the first step. For the next I must keep away those kids from dying in a firefight.

I will crawl up step by step and achieve a good ending.

Bullets and life

From the next day I immediately started to gather people and ammunition.

Sometimes a lot of ammo is a far better shield than buildings or trenches, and it will save the children.

When soldiers are under fire, they lower their heads, but in that state even if they fire back their accuracy is very uncertain. Both sides are shooting at each other behind the covers. During this time it’s crucial to not have any victims. It’s common in present-day wars that not even a single person dies under 5000 bullets. If a victim appears it means that the enemy wasn’t hiding. That is when you’re out of ammo, or the enemy goes around and cut you off.

In that sense keeping a reserve of ammunition can keep the children safe better than trenches or any other shelter. That’s why I put all my strength into securing ammunition. Compromises can’t be helped though. When there is not much ammo, there is no other option than a banzai attack^[1], that is a

rash charge.

Near my and Omar's house I've made an ammo collection point and started to gather it from different places.

Most of the collected ammunition was made in China. I've heard that Chinese businessmen reach even to this region. Considering growing influence of China I realized that calling them a factory of the world wasn't a lie. Anyway I'm thankful for the gathered ammo. Yet it wasn't the level I was aiming for, so I asked Omar to reduce the use of live ammo as much as possible during the training. If there will be a lot of ammo, casualties will also decrease. I want enough ammo so that the walls and ceiling in the place it's stored can't be seen.

I fold my arms and think. Then someone called me.

"Arata, is ammunition gathered here?" – Djibril said and approached me. When I saw her again with a gun I was going to avert my eyes, but I endured it. She holds in both hands a box of ammunition.

From this point I can't be deceived by anyone anymore and can never look away. From now on it's Omar's, Djibril's and my story.

From now I am not going to be the deceived side, I am the one who is going to deceive. It's a rank up from a bad guy to a genuine scoundrel. That's what I said to myself.

"Djibril."

"Yes?"

"Sorry for dragging you into this."

"No, everyone is... thankful. We weren't scattered and sold. It's okay. We're not going to lose to adults." – she said it while smiling.

"I put you into a lot of trouble."

“It’s fine. I will support you Arata.” – when she said that to me with a smiling face I started to doubt if my decision was correct, but I thought I should keep faith in myself.

Making a map

Arrangements continue.

I don’t know when the enemy will start the second retribution attack, but either way I think it’s not so distant. At this point I think that I wasted a lot of time during my life of a prisoner. I regretted it. I was playing around like that – what a selfish man I am.

As first retribution they’ve attacked by aerial bombing, but at the bottom of the valley in this village they can’t deal much damage. After bombing they will probably go by land. It doesn’t seem at all that the enemy will stop with just an aerial bombing.

It will be sensible to say that as they had an act of betrayal from the inside, it won’t be strange if as an example they will even massacre us.

Training was conducted by Omar.

I decided to remake a tactical map. I have it in my head, but others don’t. In order to give instruction I will surely need it.

People from the village also don’t have a map of the vicinity, so I think that the map I saw had to be made from a satellite image or photographed from the air. Like Google Maps. I am pretty sure that military maps are made in the same manner.

In Japan I could have gone to a net cafe and print it from google maps as a substitute, but unfortunately in this country, although there are mountains, there is no net cafes. Probably I couldn’t use it after all, because such small populated areas

have low resolution in the first place. Thinking about it I consoled myself.

Unfortunately I don't have knowledge in surveying. That's why I started with a failure. But I've heard that someone from the village learned surveying at central university and thanks to connections that person came to me in a hurry.

Important mountain roads are held by the company or American army. That's why I chose the shortest steep road that no one passes, crossed the valley and sent a messenger that will travel on foot through the mountains.

One boy's uncle from group C named Mularaf made it before 5 days has passed. He has an impressive mustache and he's got much more modern knowledge than anyone from the village. When he heard my plan at first he frowned, but in the end he agreed. Apparently he had exactly the same opinion about wanting to decrease losses.

He brought a map which was in a large extent copied from maps left by the former Soviet Union army. He was gathering them since university and brought it to me, as he thought it would be impossible to survey for the map now.

I was thinking that making a map was easier. Ashamed by my own ignorance, I was thankful for his cleverness, especially since there wasn't any copier.

It was drawn in 1960ties. I thought that maybe it was too old, but probably it was the latest one. I was terrified by the difference we had in intelligence compared to my company and the American army, but I appreciated the fact that my memory could compensate for the lacking places.

Complaining won't do anything.

Discussion with the patriarch

I frequently visit patriarch's and Djibril's place and meet with them to make arrangements.

Patriarch, who in my business terminology is a OO manager, says that he will fight till the last soldier. Another banzai charge can't save the children and many villagers will die.

Everyday I tried to convince him for what and where we should fight and that he should think about the concessions we will get from the result of that fight.

War occurs because of the differences in opinions and ends by a mutual agreement that both sides want to end it. In this case the main source of that difference is the established transport path, which traverse this people autonomous territory. The government of this country tried to make a nice face to America, they didn't hold enough discussions about this region and enforced it. It led to military conflict, military activity.

But this activity is limited. They can't keep winning forever, they can't fight forever. I emphasized that. There is a need for a mutual agreement. If possible, then at an early stage.

Patriarch was angry, but Djibril's father nodded with interest.

"So, what are we going to do?" – he says. I looked at him and started to talk.

First thing – are they going to battle? If they are – when will they start it and how will they end it. We should assume it beforehand.

The enemies are government troops and American army, but even they can't keep fighting forever. I insisted on that. They can't fuss over this place forever. Company can't go on with just undertaking such wars and conflicts. American army has to be more busy with other things.

"You're even worried about how the enemy is going to end

the war?” -said Djibril’s father as if he was just about to clap.

“If we’re going to limit the damages to a minimum, yes.” – I replied.

Silence falls for some time.

Patriarch starts to talk with a groan.

“How is it different from surrendering from the start?”

“Surrender would bring more damage. What enemy needs is a warning. Even after surrender it doesn’t change a thing. They can do two things to us. Be nice to us in their own way or just kill us.”

Djibril’s father smiles bitterly and says:

“This is madness”.

“Madness? This village also, while sending them soldiers, waited for the right time to strike, so for them it’s as complicated as it is for us.”

Djibril’s father looks at me and laughs. He reminds me of Lanson. It was like a father’s expression, who is looking at his talented son.

“One is not a hero with just being brave. Are you really going to bring dawn to this land?”

“What’s this about?”

Djibril’s father says without answering me:

“Do you have any plans for beginning and ending the war?”

“I do. Please listen.” – I replied.

Handshake under the clothes line

I decided to send soldiers on a patrol, just like I did at the company. Although the scale is smaller, like a single squad of

an unit.

I made a strict order to absolutely avoid fights, just run away. I also won't make them hold weapons. If we can't win anyway, it's better not to carry too much weight.

If an unrelated person is going to be attacked, this land's order and war situation will turn into a quagmire. Because population feelings will extremely worsen. I counted not on enemy's conscience, but on their good sense and common sense.

"You're becoming more and more greedy. No matter how low is our war potential, you can't take advantage of enemy's common sense."

I was speaking to myself, while drying laundry before battle. My necktie and suit. Omar laughed, while polishing a rifle. When I scowled at him he looked at me seriously.

"A guy with a military talent doesn't show that he has one if he's not in the military."

"That is?"

After putting gun on the knee Omar said to me:

"You've always been living in peace. I think that talent was just sleeping all the time."

"I thought that I would be always leaving it unused."

"But thanks to the fact that you awoke it, victims in children will decrease."

"Allowing them to have guns, that is?" – I spasmodically retorted, cooled my head with a wet hand and then said:

"Sorry Omar. I'm getting **nervous**. I'm grateful to you. Very."

Omar smiles.

"We're friends, right?"

“Thanks. Without those words I wouldn’t make it to this point.” – I answered.

And then not minding where we are we shook hands.

I took a deep breath and opened my mouth. If there is something to say I thought that this is the only chance.

“Omar. When I was in the rookie training, I saw a similar thing to that deserted village. There is a possibility that I’ve done it. Training camp was in another country, so I have no way to make sure, but...”

“That’s what I thought. You’re always so bold, but just at that time you were acting weird.”

Omar’s response was more calm than I thought. His eyes looked gentle. I felt like crying.

“I am not bold. Just stupid.”

“It’s the same. You can’t decide someone’s value yourself. Surrounding does.” – said Omar.

“I am proud that I have a friend in you. And that’s your surrounding evaluation.”

Skirmish

The day when the enemy was caught in the patrolling net which children make, was a day exactly one month after the attack on the camp.

The net becomes thin along the outside, so near the outermost rim it spreads only along the road. Farthest patrol line is in the distance of 40km. And that’s the place from where the response came.

According to the patrol, the enemy formed a long row of cars – trucks and armored vehicles. Apparently their average speed

per hour is falling under 50km.

When I received that report from the radio, I decided to close down the patrolling net.

I withdraw the children, leaving only a minimum number which sticks to the enemy, and send the rest back to the village. Next time I will use them as soldiers.

I contact the village.

While it's still dark, little by little I send people from the village to take shelter in the ruins. Through the night children are coming back successively.

While I was packing bullets into a rucksack, I said to the children that it's okay to waste them and send them out, each to their positions.

Omar who started moving together with children said it will be fine. I didn't have any basis that it will be, but I decided to smile. I didn't smile because of the present situation, I smiled to Omar.

I was left in the village by myself. While humming I pasted a lot of maps on one of the walls of the children's room.

Two partners with a radio. Let's pray that there won't be any interceptions or jamming. Although I've heard about such amazing electronic weapons only from Omar's stories. I didn't feel that I want to meet one of them today.

My half of the work is done.

I see Omar and a donkey from the window. But not that broken robot, a real one lent from the village. They've started to move – Omar, children, and donkey in the middle.

It looked just like a big black merry bro was going with children to a picnic. I bitterly smiled.

In order to take the dried necktie and suit I went outside from

the entryway. Under it there are a 4 step stairs, on which I saw Djibril, sitting and holding her knees. I said to her to help me with taking the laundry. She said okay and confused got up, then came along with me.

I wanted to gently brush her head, saying she's great, but I restrained. When I was a child I resented it myself when someone did that to me.

Thoroughly dried clothes feel good. Sun must have been strong.

When I tie my necktie Djibril is looking at me from a very close distance. That is at a stretch of a hand.

“Is tying a necktie so rare?”

“Excuse me.”

Djibril is embarrassed.

“Just now I saw wings on your back. Magnificent golden eagle's wings.”

“What're you talking about?”

I laughed. I don't know if a golden eagles make a cute face or a scary one. Or maybe it's a Djibril's tribe legend.

“Now when you mention it, you often call me a golden eagle.”

“It's an animal which flies magnificently in the sky. It brings dawn.”

I silenced myself as I tend to say negative things and put my arm though the sleeve, showed Djibril my back and asked if it's neatly stretching on my shoulders.

She reservedly pulled back on my jacket and said that it's fine.

“I think of going back to Japan, when this war ends.”

Unexpectedly my face turned red. I realized on this stage, that Sophie was always asking me if she can go to Japan with me.

Djibril sadly with both hands pulled her headgear and hid her face.

Just don't slap me – I thought and at the same time I got depressed by my own insensitivity, realizing her situation, so I smiled.

“Oh I was thinking about setting up my own private military company, you know. As Omar says, I apparently have a military talent.”

Djibril couldn't say anything interesting and was just nodding.

“Omar will probably go with me. I would also be happy if everyone could go with me. Well, for now we have to literally earn war funds to cross over to Japan.”

Djibril returned the position of her headgear. She looks at me with teary eyes.

“But I will be happy if you could come without any of that disgusting manner^[2]. Will you come?”

“It's okay. I'll come.”

I nodded, while wondering if I didn't make a mistake in English on a crucial part. What if she took it as asking for a disgusting manner.

Anyway, I was struck that her teary eyes change a little to a smile, so I couldn't resist and gently brushed her head. I thought that adults just can't help themselves and brush heads.

Well, I will solve misunderstandings later, work's first.

I was thinking that Sophie can say idealistic things because she is from a country, where there is such climate. In that case I should take Djibril and the abandoned kids and bring them there. It's not that they should be like Sophie, but I want to give them a choice to carve their own path.

Battle begins

I was in the kids room and was viewing the map on the wall with a radio in one hand.

“It’s Omar. I’ve reached the position.”

“OK Omar. Let’s proceed calmly.”

“There’s no doubt. You’re used to that.”

“OK, let’s go.”

I took away my hand from the radio’s transmit button and gazed at the map. I hear his voice and imagine the situation.

Enemy is halting march in a location 20 km away from the village, because they noticed the scattered land mines on the road. Seems like one vehicle is damaged and created a massive jam.

Distance between vehicles shrinks considerably.

Then from every direction firing with rockets is beginning.

I hear Omar saying BINGO. It seems like a truck exploded flashily and blazed up.

I guess that at the time of the attack soldiers jumped from the truck, but because of that, chaos on the road is probably even bigger.

Bullets from machine guns are flying there.

If they held back the infantry and carefully examined every direction, they could avoid that, but they probably didn’t expect that at this distance from the village they will fall into a trap. It’s a mountain road after all. Width is small, so sending infantry on patrol to different places slows down advance to around 3 km per hour. I estimated that they will get back to moving in the vehicles at the last moment, until enemy’s threat drops near the bottom.

I repaid them here for what they've done to me during the rookie training. That's what happens when you're feeling safe because there is still distance to your target.

You should have conducted a patrol, but sorry – this area is under my jurisdiction.

I receive a report from the kids of team A. Enemy has losses in soldiers from the machine gun.

I imagine the situation, while hearing the report.

In military machine guns are common, they can't cause any damage to opponent. It's a weapon to make enemy hide. Fact, that it actually caused damage to enemy, points out that they can't even properly hide.

"It's okay if you overheat the gun barrel. You can use up all the bullets. Please shoot ceaselessly."

Now it's time to make use of the situation. Well, in 10 minutes I guess.

I receive a report from kids of team D that at the rear of the column of vehicles, which are still safe, soldiers who got off are beginning to take a detour. I give instructions to begin corresponding offensive.

Team D begins firing. Detouring forces are stopped. This group contains skilled ones, who're operating as a sniping team. For a trained infantry, snipers who're hitting accurately are more frightening than scattering bullets of machine guns. That's why they stopped. If they show guts ignoring losses and just move on with the detour... there's no way they will do that. Enemy knows well from what kind of sniper rifles was the last firing. Whole unit will be wiped out.

As I predicted – according to the report enemy movement has stopped. I was glad that enemy is sensible. Thanks to that damage on both sides will be minimal. If war is a way of rough

dialogue, this time it's enemy turn to talk. I want to get along with them.

Although we succeed in stopping them, their overall number is bigger. If we give them a chance to take another detour it's over. In the end we're going to be devoured.

10 minutes passed. Now it's probably the time when the enemy is going to recover from that chaos.

I declare the end of the battle and retreat all units. As long as there are no victims we will run. I made them leave shooting machine guns. They don't have a function like an electric fan to move automatically, so enemy probably will notice our intentions, but I think that for now it's fine.

There's no use for machine guns so let's leave them all. I'm giving instructions to shoot away all rockets also. I tell them they can also leave the donkey if they want.

Children without ballast are disappearing into mountains and retreat. Comparing to the magnitude of mountains, human is small, but even that small human in military sense is important.

Because he's hard to find.

Enemy will continue the battle, so they probably won't abandon the equipment. That being the case, our light forces can run away. In mountains it makes huge difference.

I thought that if the enemy is moving 4 km per hour, well 3, then we have 4 hours.

For now I want to take a piss. I can't get wet in front of the children.

End of long reminiscence

Enemy is smoothly getting closer.

Naturally he's not putting any tactical units on the road, which leads to the village. It troubles me.

I ordered adults to leave defense of the village and go around the enemy's back.

Then they can do as they please. I tell them they can attack or not attack, but with strict order to not give any prisoners. I told them that if someone is going to be a prisoner, it's better to die for the sake of the village. I said them just that, that if they're going to attack, I'm not going to help them.

Two hours before the scheduled arrival I finish a meal and start leaving the village with Djibril. I looked up at that fields similar to rice terraced ones. I smile. I can't wage a war being sentimental. That's why I turned my back. But still, I had overwhelming curiosity to look at it a little.

And then I took position in a place quite far from the village.

I was stationed in a place that doesn't protect the village, in a created trench in a place opposite to where I predicted that the enemy will attack.

There are some trenches prepared for traffic roads and there are also some fake ones. Three platforms with machine guns made by Omar. It was a genuine encampment. In a place overlooking the village.

There is one tactical unit S preparing. I personally will take command of it. We're not going to do anything difficult, so it will be fine with me.

Enemy has stopped at the entrance to the valley. Not even 2 km to the village.

Suddenly I've heard something like a voice from a megaphone and bent backward.

"..." – I've heard only the last part, which suggested some request^[3].

It was a female's voice. Moreover in English. I remember it. It's elvish English.

"I repeat. It's a warning. Release the prisoner, release Arata. If he's dead hand over the corpse. If you can't do this, we'll attack the village."

Djibril opens her eyes widely and looks at me.

I've got a headache. Sophie. Why do you always do things out of place.

Without noticing a bitter smile is appearing on my face. When I hear that voice I lose the strength to fight. No, from the start I didn't honestly think about fighting.

Probably she volunteered for government's troops OO. I imagine Sophie with that setting. Has she left the job, or is company also involved in this? I think probably the latter. For business results retribution is probably necessary. But they don't want losses in their war potential or contractors, so they are lending OOs.

I carefully listen to the broadcast. Sophie speaks with a voice she had never before – with seriousness and sadness, she's saying about returning my body.

I realize that someone grasps my sleeve. It was Djibril. She shakes her small head.

"You must not go to the demon's place Arata."

"It's not a demon. It's more like a djinn you know."

"It's an evil djinn."

Dumb djinn. Nope, more like an unlucky djinn. Also with a horrible intuition. I smiled bitterly, thinking that whatever she is, she's not evil.

Djibril holds her breath in a way as if this moment would last an eternity and looks at me.

“It’s fine. I’m not going there.”

With headgear put on her head she is wiping tears with the back of the hand.

“I’m glad to hear it. I really am.”

“But now I have a problem.”

I’m safe, but now as I turned into an enemy I can’t make contact anyway.

I haven’t honestly thought about fighting, but if I give my name here the plan will go to waste.

I think for a bit. I feel very bad for Sophie, but I don’t have any other choice but to keep silent.

Actually I really feel that I am doing something very bad. Damn you Sophie. I have a problem. We haven’t been agreeing about everything, but I also had feelings toward that peculiar friendship.

Although, even if I go back to the company, future of the village and the children will be dark. My plan is collapsing.

Eventually I looked again at Djibril’s worried face and made up my mind. If I have to choose between a girl and children then a reasonable choice for a 30 year old will be the children. Though saying a girl, I can’t imagine that she could become my lover, or rather I’m even shaking when I imagine that. If we were together my nerves would surely be shaved off with a sandpaper daily, until in the end it would kill me.

I put my hand on Djibril’s head. She looks like she’s going to cry. It’s time to show the acting ability of a 30 years old. I thought it’s good that I’m 30. As a teen I was too pure, and as 20 I went with the flow, so I wouldn’t get out from this for sure.

“We’re going on with our strategy. According to the plan.” – I said with dignity. Frozen children came alive and looked at me.

They're taking up positions.

Sophie's patience ended after 10 minutes from that.

Bombardment^[4]. Piercing whistle. Shell misses, exploding away from the village.

During my stay in the company I never saw anything like that, but it seems to me it was a mortar. As it is a simple cannon, since it was invented, it is frequently used here even at present. I heard that apparently some extremists once aimed it at the imperial palace.

Mortar shells are fired continuously, one might even say – with certain grace. This loud sound is like a music of the battlefield, similar to the sound of paper popper. So I thought that if it goes like this any longer, soon it will start hitting the village. It's possible that in the past people also killed each other while listening to this stupid war music.

Oh well, now it's irrelevant, time for thinking is after. Or before.

Putting on earmuffs I said as seriously as I can: "Many times have I thought of ways to end this war. For now it goes well. Let's remain calm to keep it that way."

Boys and girls around nod their heads. I don't want at least my eyes to betray me. To tell the truth that's why I tried to put such seriousness that didn't suit me in this speech.

While setting the formation I went with my thoughts back to the past. To the times in Tokyo when I didn't have a penny to my name.

I smiled. I made only failures in the past, and can't say it's okay now. But I just can't let it end like this.

"Even if one war ends, then comes another. Just remember the place where we're going to meet." – I said that and waved my hand as a sign to begin.

Buildings in the village started to take hits from bombardment. They're burning and being blown away. It looked like already enough things was blown away, but maybe because of delayed reaction or just some spare bullets, scrupulously bombardment was repeated. I was looking at it, suspecting that those are bullets for destroying houses.

Destroying a building has meaning. Normally when enemy confines himself in the village and adopts a strategy of holding a castle. You surround one building and firefight has no end. It's essential to omit that labor. If buildings are not essential, it's better to destroy them – that's the way of thinking in our business.

I see armored vehicles breaking into the village. Gun turrets on them are moving and firing. I wonder if they mistook even one of the swaying curtains?

I smiled, thinking that there is not a single person there. Kids whose houses were destroyed are not happy, but I said to them:

“As long as people don't die it's fine.”

Apparently I have a calm disposition toward things. But I don't plan to change that.

Destroying the village is important to my ritual of ending the war. I gaze leisurely at all that.

Next they are arriving one after another. Soldiers are getting off from the armored vehicles.

They look left and right. Now is the time.

I waved my hand. Simultaneous attack from above is beginning. Houses are burning and due to smoke vision is bad. Aim will be uncertain, but it's not like I want to watch enemy's corpses so I thought maybe it's okay that way. I also pity Sophie for reducing her score.

For the second time today, attack from an unexpected spot is

causing huge chaos.

Even if they know our position, guns from armored vehicles don't have such angle of elevation to be able to shoot here. If they climb up the terraced rice fields they will be shot from above without a possibility to fire back. Next thing they do is probably changing the aiming spot of mortars.

I wait 10 minutes. Mortars begin to land. They're still drifting to the west. Today wind from the east is also strong. Aerial bombing was drifting to the west as well.

From mortars explosions there is even more smoke. Enemy must be probably climbing using that screen, that is shield from the smoke.

Well, we were also waiting for that smoke. I'm really glad that it's not me, but Sophie that first opened a retreat path – I thought and gave directions to hide in the smoke and withdraw.

Perfect withdrawal. Now we can throw out all weapons. Limiting casualties to the minimum and giving the opponent a political win. That was my plan for ending the war.

If war is a method to achieve a political goal, when the enemy can achieve that goal he loses any meaning to continuing the fight. That's what I concluded. More concretely, while the enemy took damage to some extent, his base – the village – was destroyed, large quantity of weapons and ammunition is seized, and the enemy himself is forced to retreat, it's considered as a good thing. It's enough with that. Such are the fruits of war I am explaining above. It doesn't matter how many of us or civilians they've killed on that occasion. It won't be reported if there's any. Because even 0 won't matter.

Being arrogant behind Sophie's back I think about what must be the position of the enemy's commander. Because the enemy suffered some casualties, the commander will need some

guarantee after such a fierce fight, so he will probably be highlighting to the maximum the fact that he destroyed the enemy's main base – the village. It's okay. Other side has probably the will to fight unless they win, but for sure not to the extent to fighter after the win.

Assuming that for the enemy topographically it is just a waypoint, he will probably want to pass it while avoiding trouble in the region. There's no doubt that once finishing the capture of the village, he will leave that unpleasant land. On the other hand for people from the destroyed village, although there is no human casualties they caused a suitable severe blow to the enemy. Village can claim their own victory and then war ends with both sides proclaiming a victory without engaging. And here I reached a point of compromise – that is what I was aiming for in my plan. I expect realistic judgment from each responsible sides after this. – I summarized.

From now on I won't worry about it. I will worry about myself and those around me. That's what I've decided.

I decided to leave one map at the military encampment. On the back of it I wrote in English: "Take care Sophie."

Probably she won't notice, or if she does it probably will make her unnecessarily sad, but I thought it's better than nothing.

Walking in the middle of the dug out communication canal which went from the trenches, I fixed a wrinkle on my tie.

I make a smile. Waiting Djibril shyly extends a hand to me. I take it, slip into the smoke and escape.

I begin somewhat of a picnic, with children who only had lunch boxes. I really want to make one at Japan's hills and fields once. Take children and a donkey. From the bottom of my heart I'm thinking about making a picnic with them. Today it was meant to be a rehearsal of it.

Going back to Japan

Japan from a plane was always strangely the same. Or that was country itself which doesn't change.

I look behind my seat. There are 24 kids, so everything is fine. Now they're going to enter the country with a tourist visa. Some are nervous, some can't calm down without a gun, some are sleeping like a log, and some are looking at me. One that looks at me is Djibril. Well, everyone is probably anxious. They haven't flown an airplane and they know Japan only from stories as a land of anime.

Landing's soon. I smiled and looked at the front.

We're landing. It's written in Japanese: Welcome to Japan.

Narita Airport as for the entrance of Japan is more shabby than Haneda. I wished to show them Haneda so much – I think dully.

"It's more quiet than you thought, isn't it?" – I say, while pulling a suitcase and the girl with a headgear agreed with disoriented eyes.

"Is it really that quiet?"

"Yes."

I smile. Well, wanting to show a flashy airport is so childish. I must behave more like an adult. If I don't Djibril and the others would have to hurriedly become one.

"What about Omar who went ahead?"

"I've heard that he's eating tempura."

"I see. Shall we also eat?"

Djibril agreed and came with me.

And when we walked around the airport, she revealed her

face and after looking at the women walking around she rushed over to me with a trot and asked if I don't feel ashamed.

I think for a while and smile bitterly.

“To tell you the truth I'm a little ashamed. I was away from Japan for too long.

I didn't return to Japan, I've began advancing into it. Whether it's Takeshima^[5] or some other place, in this country there's lot of dormant demand. Might as well make a fund raising campaign on the Internet about using a military force in future problems. There is a lot of potential customers.

Advancing into Japan will surely go well.

^ 1. For those that didn't get it – it's a suicide charge (shouting is optional).

^ 2. This refers to the attempt to push Djibril onto Arata as a wife. He wants her to come with him without any ulterior motives. And yeah, I do think it's confusing.

^ 3. There is only a part of the sentence which suggests request and it's pretty much impossible to translate into English, hence “...”. But wait... weren't they supposed to speak in English there? Oh well, details.

^ 4. And here we are at the start of the story. For those that didn't realize, this is a copy paste from the prologue, as in we ended the reminiscence part of the story.

^ 5. One of the places over which Japan has a sovereignty dispute (with some other country).

Afterword

There is a novelist who is poor in writing afterwords. That is – me.

So hello, Yuri Shibamura here. For some it's probably our first meeting and there are probably others who know me well. Anyway, what shall I say – I wrote a novel. Thank you for reading.

That's all I should say. Oh no, too bad. I didn't have even 0,01s of a problem with afterwords, making around 10 drafts. Huh, can I do this like that? – I thought and it passed through, so now we're here.

That plan of doing this probably passed through more than I expected. You know why? Because I'm not the editor.

Editor can be a novelist, but novelist can't become an editor. I understand it well through my experience so far. Hence I'm a novelist – not an editor, that's why I give different ideas, but even with the ability to materialize them I apparently have weak intuition whether they will pass through or not.

Well, eventually I want to try to polish my editing skills as well. If I do this I will be able to make the current editor write a book and edit it myself.

I was writing 1 month, around 20 work days. If I had tried I think I would be able to shorten that time, but other than that I want to give you a quality product today.

I worked on iPad. That's because when I was going back to my home town the project passed through and I didn't have other writing tools, so I did this on iPad and it went surprisingly well.

I was progressing by 6000-8000 words per day.

But if I tell that story to other people from the same

profession I'm treated as weirdo.

iPad is making only auto-corrections so probably it doesn't have a good reputation with serious novelists.

In fact I have also tools like Pomera^[1], and while making manga I'm mainly using it, but not this time. I'm glad I will be able to write on Pomera next time. When I'll receive payment for this, I'm going to buy additional new Pomera.

So this work is a fiction. That's obvious, but even in this story there are different fictions. Please do not take them seriously.

During this work there are various fictions. In reality there is no such job as an OO, armored vehicles can't be transported by air at such scale (For setting of the novel: In Russia takes place unprecedented – while writing this – military operation with air transport and Arata just came across to take part in such in one scene. This operation is going through Russia and reaches even to Djibril's village, which leads to guerrilla strikes).

One of the biggest fiction is the reward system, which in reality yearly amount is at 4 millions yens, yet I thought you can't risk your life for that, so I decided to make it 6 millions.

Long ago during bubble time, novels didn't even treat 1 million as worthy of risking life. Thinking about it in that sense makes me realize about the scale of deflation and at the same time rack my brain when I think about Japan's future.

On the other hand there are parts that aren't fiction too. Like pet bottles on Djibril's tribe ceilings. Actually it was popularized in developing countries by American MIT. Initiated for starters in Philippines as indoor lighting during the day. Manufacturing method has been spreading to Central Asia in this story.

Since it's day-time there are people who say that it's better working outside, but for developing countries women, who tend to stay inside and do manual labor or study, it's a handy

invention and they treat that pet bottles with bleaching agent and water (during the day, pet bottle with water and bleaching agent reflects light from above and illuminate a room) as very important, even with enshrinement.

In this story America is taking on a villain's role, but it's from Arata and Djibril's standpoint. However I think that in a different standpoint it would have been a different viewpoint.

I think about writing next about that different standpoint, but time is ending. I express my gratitude to Shizuma, who without complaints drew those fantastic illustrations (Do you go for a drink?), chief editor Furuta (Thanks), above all to Hiramura, editor in charge of this who I made work everyday to late hours and early at the beginning of new year, and finally to all readers who picked up this work. I'm going to end with this.

Thank you everyone.

I was able to reach that point because I wasn't alone.

January 7th 2012, Yuri Shibamura

^ 1. Japanese device thingie for writing (among other things). Google it if you're curious.